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## **The National Service Issue, 1899-1914.**

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THE NATIONAL SERVICE ISSUE, 1899 - 1914

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CHAPTER III

The change of government in December 1905 brought a new Secretary of State, Haldane, and yet another scheme of Army reform. The reorganization of the Auxiliary Forces into the Territorial Army was received with both suspicion and acclaim, for whilst some, for good or ill, saw it as a transitional stage in the adoption of compulsion, others believed its success would put an end to the growing agitation for national service. Although the War Minister encouraged and used the latter argument to further acceptance of his plans, his conception did have much in common with the thinking of the National Service League which, therefore, gave the scheme a guarded welcome and decided to reserve judgement. Even at this time (1907-8), however, there were some practical questions, notably the liability of the United Kingdom to invasion and the efficacy of Territorial Artillery, on which the League (and it was not alone) was not prepared to withhold criticism. Moreover, as the new organization took shape and its basic weaknesses and expedient nature became apparent, it was evident that the period of restrained criticism was to be of limited duration.

On 4 December 1905 the Unionist Government came to its long-overdue end when Arthur Balfour resigned. The new Secretary of State for War in the Liberal Government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was Richard Burdon Haldane. Haldane, who had never held office before, had little popular following in the party; nor, unsurprisingly since he had recently intrigued for Campbell-Bannerman's elevation to the House of Lords,<sup>1</sup> was he on the best of terms with the Prime Minister who, familiar with the trials of Army

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1 In the so-called 'Relugas Compact': Richard Burdon Haldane. An Autobiography (London, 1929), pp.157-62.

administration, 'was certainly not unaware of the element of penance in this appointment'.<sup>1</sup> That he was a Liberal Imperialist and erst-while henchman of the feckless Rosebery goes some way towards explaining the suspicion and mistrust which attached to him in the Liberal party; but it cannot furnish the full explanation because others like Asquith and Grey, who were similarly tainted, did not suffer a comparable loss of esteem. In Haldane's case there was another factor: his Liberalism was suspect. According to the Liberal editor of the Daily News, A.G. Gardiner,

the type of his Liberalism is German. It is vague and indeterminate. It breathes expediency rather than the compulsion of principle. It approaches politics purely as a business proposition, and seeks to establish national greatness on scientific and material rather than moral foundations. 2

Radicals, such as Gardiner, found it hard to recognize that principle or moral sense in politics could exist outside the confines of their own creed. On this premise, the gravamen of the charge was merited, for Haldane was 'essentially a nonparty politician' whose 'loyalties were to ideas and friendships rather than party traditions'.<sup>3</sup>

The task of Army reorganization which faced him was a daunting one and had defeated his Unionist predecessors. In addition, the general election of January 1906 had produced an enormous Liberal majority and in the process had moved the party's centre

1 J.A. Spender, The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, G.C.B. II (London, 1923), p.198.

2 Prophets, Priests, and Kings, new edition (London, 1914), p.285.

3 Stephen E. Koss, Lord Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism (New York and London, 1969), p.18.

of gravity ominously to the left. On the face of it the Little Englanders and Radicals<sup>1</sup> in his own party, with their commitment to social reform and reduction in defence expenditure, posed a greater threat to the new Secretary of State than did the Opposition rump. Actually the threat was more apparent than real. As long as he could effect some reduction in the estimates and steer clear of measures which savoured of compulsion, he could carry through his plans. Amorphous and disparate as they were, the Radicals were no match for Haldane, who bemused and battered them into submission with speeches lasting several hours.<sup>2</sup> Lacking expertise on military affairs they 'felt out of their depth. Truth to be told, they found such debates boring and considered them a waste of valuable parliamentary time.'<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Liberal Imperialists, though numerically weak in the house, were well represented in the Cabinet. They had Balfour to thank for this: had he chosen to dissolve rather than resign, the Liberal Government would have been formed after the general election and would probably have taken on a very different complexion.<sup>4</sup>

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1 The use of 'Radical' is fraught with difficulties and the use of the capital letter may suggest a greater degree of organization and cohesion than was in fact the case. However, within the context of this period and upon matters of defence and foreign policy the Radicals were a recognizable group. Perhaps the clinching fact is that they themselves acknowledged and acted upon an assumption of separateness.

2 'He [Haldane] has been known at the end of the second hour of a speech to start afresh with a pleasant remark on "these preliminary observations".' Gardiner, p.282.

3 A.J. Anthony Morris Radicalism Against War, 1906-1914. The Advocacy of Peace and Retrenchment (London, 1972), p.92.

4 John Wilson, CB. A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London, 1973), p.458.

Nor were circumstances unpropitious. Haldane's appointment was generally well received amongst those who cared about the Army - partly from relief that the office had not fallen to a representative of the Radical wing of the party. Initially, too, potential opponents, mindful of the failure of the hasty and ill-considered Unionist schemes, were prepared to exercise patience and restraint. For all that, it promised to be uphill work. Fortunately the new Secretary of State, though a self-confessed novice in Army affairs,<sup>1</sup> had the successful lawyer's talent for quickly mastering his brief and was endowed with a titanic capacity for work. Above all he found the work congenial; and, whatever his shortcomings on the public platform, his ability at close quarters to win the understanding, support, and loyalty of those who were associated with his scheme of Army reform was of inestimable value in the success he achieved.<sup>2</sup>

Haldane introduced his first Army estimates on 8 March 1906.<sup>3</sup> As yet he admitted to no 'cut and dried plan', but he was able to provide some indication of the lines along which his thought was developing - interspersed with soothing and conciliatory genuflections in the direction of the Radicals:

The Army touches social questions in the closest way. The relations of capital and labour, the whole problem of education, the topic of temperance, the science of medicine, questions relating to the Empire - and I am one of those who

1 Autobiography, p.183.

2 During his brief return to the War Office in 1914 he wrote to his sister, Elizabeth: 'There is much to be said for ... handing over to Kitchener ... the public would be comforted but I doubt whether the soldiers would. They know what they want and like working with me ...', 4 Aug. 1914, Hal. 6012, f.51. It is clear from the testimony of Ian Hamilton, Haig, Ellison and others that this was not vanity but largely true.

3 Hansard, 4th ser., CLIII. 655-86.

are not ashamed to say they take the deepest interest in them - and, last, but not least the science of economy, these are topics which in themselves are very attractive. <sup>1</sup>

He had, he claimed, rejected everything which did not contribute to fighting efficiency, for 'if this Parliament has been returned pledged to anything, it is to cutting down unnecessary expenditure'. He could, however, promise only a small reduction of £17,000 in the estimates for the coming year.

The most important part of the speech was his endorsement of the Blue-Water view that invasion was impossible. In contrast to the armies of France and Germany, therefore, the British Army was maintained for fighting overseas and was 'necessarily a professional Army; we could not get such an Army by conscription'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore,

If the Army is not wanted for home defence, then its size is something which is capable of being calculated. The size of the striking force is the principal ingredient in the present cost of the Army. <sup>3</sup>

And because of the security afforded by Britain's island position, expansion could take place after the outbreak of hostilities:

If we had to fight a great war on the plains of India or in defence of its frontiers it is not likely that such a contingency would come about without a considerable time elapsing. We know that a long time must elapse, and in that period there is the possibility of training men and getting them ready. <sup>4</sup>

Although the details had not of course been finalized, it is clear from this speech that the vital strategic assumptions for Haldane's whole scheme of Army reform had been made at this early stage.

His plans for the Regular Army were put before the Commons in the following July.<sup>5</sup> He began with a repetition of the principles

1 *ibid.*, 657.

2 *ibid.*, 673.

3 *ibid.*, 674.

4 *ibid.*, 676.

5 12 July 1906, Hansard, 4th ser., CLX. 1075-1119.

governing the organization of the Army which he had enunciated in March. Then he went on to explain his plan for the creation of an Expeditionary Force of six infantry divisions and four cavalry brigades (since March the expression 'striking force' had been supplanted). Units in excess of the requirements of the Expeditionary Force were to be disbanded and this involved reductions in the Artillery and Infantry, including in the case of the latter two Guards battalions. It was on these reductions, before provision had been made for adequate substitutes, and the shortage of parliamentary time allocated for discussion of the proposals that the main Opposition criticism in both houses was concentrated.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the really crucial question about the Expeditionary Force was largely ignored. 'If the Army is not wanted for home defence,' Haldane had said, 'then its size is something which is capable of being calculated', but he did not divulge the grounds upon which the calculation of six divisions, roughly 160,000 men, was arrived at. Where then was such a Force to be employed? If he was not pressed upon this point, it was because it was taken for granted by most M.P.s that the Expeditionary Force was for the defence of the Empire and especially of India, a presumption which Haldane's speeches had served to reinforce:

Our business is to maintain an expeditionary force just as large as to form a reserve which may enable us swiftly and resolutely to reinforce the outposts of our forces, which are the outposts of the Empire, and which acts as its police. 2

Such a role was in accord with the strategical functions of the Army as defined under the previous Government. The numbers involved also corresponded closely with the assessment of India's needs later made

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1 See, for example, F.E. Smith, 19 July, *ibid.*, CLXI. 464 ff., and the Earl of Donoughmore, 24 July, *ibid.*, 899-916. According to Dunlop (p.258) Haldane had spoken for three of the six hours allowed for the debate.

2 12 July 1906, *ibid.*, CLX. 1081.



by a C.I.D. sub-committee in May 1907 to the effect that 'a military organisation at home that would enable 100,000 men to be sent to India in the first year of a war, appears a military necessity'.<sup>1</sup>

However, this report reflected more accurately the anxieties and estimations of the Government of India than the Government at home for whom the defence of India was of declining importance in 1906-7. And no one was more aware of this than Haldane. As early as 9 March 1906, at a C.I.D. meeting, he had asked the Foreign Secretary 'to place before the Committee his views as to how the probabilities of Russian aggression were affected by the changed situation arising from the Russo-Japanese war and the Anglo-French entente', venturing his own opinion that the likelihood of a Russian attack on India 'seemed to be removed for at least ten years to come'.<sup>2</sup> Sir Edward Grey confirmed that Russia had been much weakened by the war with Japan and agreed that 'for a number of years - he could not say how many - she would be quite incapable of undertaking a serious campaign against India'. He also revealed that

relations with Russia were more friendly than they had been for many years. Within the last fortnight the Russian Government had expressed a wish to reopen negotiations with us with a view to an Agreement similar to that which we had concluded with France, ...

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1 'Report of the Sub-Committee on the Military Requirements of the Empire: India', 1 May 1907, Cab. 38/13/20, p.10. Lord Hankey claimed in his autobiography that this Indian requirement 'was the original basis upon which Haldane's scheme was worked out': The Supreme Command I (London, 1961), p.61. Samuel Williamson has pointed out that Hankey was in error because by May 1907 the main part of Haldane's plan was complete: The Politics of Grand Strategy. Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), p.95. However, this kind of figure had been bandied about for several years and the C.I.D. estimate conformed to expectations.

2 'Minutes of 85th Meeting', Cab. 38/11/11, p.2.

Within weeks of the Liberal Government taking office a diplomatic revolution, occasioned by the first Moroccan crisis, had been set in motion. The change in the direction of British foreign policy was betokened by the advent to power in the Foreign Office of a group of men who were, according to Zara Steiner, 'committed to an anti-German policy and ... anxious to strengthen Britain's links with France and Russia'.<sup>1</sup> Although Steiner contends that the goals of this faction had been largely accomplished before he took office, it is evident that, from their point of view, Grey, with his European outlook and concern for the balance of power, was a most felicitous choice as Foreign Minister.

Haldane, through his close friendship and political association with Grey, was in a particularly advantageous position to appreciate the momentous strategic implications of these developments. Until 1905 it was anticipated that if Britain found herself at war with one of the great European powers her operations would be primarily naval. In a 'Memorandum on the Military Policy to be adopted in a War with Germany' of 10 February 1903, Lieut.-Col. E.A. Altham had represented attempts at offensive action on German soil as 'madness'.<sup>2</sup> The prospect of fighting in alliance with France, however, rendered land operations a viable alternative and one which was eagerly seized upon by the Army previously condemned to a subsidiary role. A memorandum of 4 January 1906 by Maj.-Gen. J.M. Grierson, Director of Military Operations, rehearsing so many of the arguments which were to become commonplace later, recommended that, in the event of a war in alliance with France against Germany, a force of 120,000 men should be sent at once to reinforce the French Army.<sup>3</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 11 January, Grierson was to urge the beginning of informal communication between the

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1 The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914 (Cambridge, 1969), p.70.

2 Cab. 38/4/9, p.8.

3 'Memorandum upon the Military Forces required for Over-sea Warfare', WO. 106/44/E1-7, p.7.

British and French General Staffs,<sup>1</sup> a proposal which, after consulting a few chosen colleagues, including of course Haldane, Grey agreed to, on condition that it was 'solely provisional and non-committal'.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Haldane was cognizant from the start of the possibility of having to dispatch a British force to the continent. A European war was not the only contingency for which the Army had to be organized, but it was manifestly the most vital one (always assuming that a decision was to be made in favour of a military rather than a naval strategy). Why then was any reference to continental operations absent from Haldane's speeches in Parliament and elsewhere in 1906-7? Why did he persist in singling out India as the probable theatre of war for his Expeditionary Force? The answer is simple: to have revealed that Britain was even toying with the idea of sending troops to Europe would have been to rouse the fury of the majority of the Liberal party implacably opposed to any continental entanglements, (after all not even the Cabinet had been consulted before the military 'conversations' were authorized<sup>3</sup>). The defence of India was safer, for even the semi-pacifist Members, who professed their abhorrence of war as a means of settling international disputes, were usually willing to make an exception in the case of Tsarist Russia.

It is tempting to suggest an instance of suggestio falsi, suppressio veri: that the talk of India and the Empire was a deception and that the Expeditionary Force was intended from its inception for the continent. Haldane stated quite clearly in his autobiography, published in 1929, that the Force was conceived for service in Europe,<sup>4</sup>

1 Grierson to Sanderson, B.D. III, doc.211, pp.172-3.

2 Sanderson to Grierson, 15 Jan. 1906, ibid., doc.214, pp.176-7.

3 'The only Ministers who knew were C.B., Grey, Haldane, Ripon, Fitzmaurice and Asquith', Wilson, p.530.

4 pp.187-9.

and others have followed him.<sup>1</sup> Because the subject was so sensitive politically, hard evidence is scarce; but, regardless of whether the Force was initially earmarked for the continent, its size and composition were certainly not determined by the specific contingency of a European war, for as Samuel Williamson persuasively argues:

Caught between the radical demands for army reductions and the conscription demands of Lord Roberts, Haldane had simply employed in a more effective form the regular forces which he found upon his arrival in office. From the start, therefore, the size of the Expeditionary Force was more a product of circumstance than of a frank assessment of possible needs: it was, in short, a political expedient which bore little correspondence to actual British needs or obligations. 2

Haldane's reorganization of the Auxiliary Forces into a new second line, the Territorial Army, exhibited a similar adjustment to domestic realities. The original conception was for nothing less than the establishment by voluntary means of 'a nation in arms';<sup>3</sup> but he had set his sights too high and overestimated the dormant martial instincts of the British people for the objective was to prove unattainable - in a peacetime at least. Thus the man who more than most

1 For example, Dunlop, pp.241-2; Dudley Sommer, Haldane of Cloan. His Life and Times 1856-1928 (London, 1960), pp.168-9; and Brian Bond, 'Richard Burdon Haldane at the War Office', Army Quarterly and Defence Journal, LXXXVI (Apr. 1963), p.36.

2 The Politics of Grand Strategy, p.100.

3 The expression 'nation in arms' owed its significance to Baron Colmar von der Goltz whose book, The Nation in Arms. A Treatise on Modern Military Systems and the Conduct of War, first published in 1883, soon became a military classic. Von der Goltz argued that 'As a rule, high culture and military power go hand-in-hand,' and predicted that soon England would 'find itself compelled to follow the lead of the times, and to strengthen the organisation of its army': English translation of 5th German edition of 1898 by Philip A. Ashworth, (London, 1913), pp.8, 9. Haldane used the expression frequently and acknowledged his debt to the book, 'my constant companion during these years', in the Commons on 7 March 1910: Hansard, 5th ser., XIV. 1188. The N.S.L. also held von der Goltz in high regard and changed the name of its journal to The Nation in Arms in March 1907.

stood for the solution of problems through the application of clear, scientific thinking had, as a result of an excess of optimism and self-deception, eventually to resign himself to an evolution which fell far short of his ideal.<sup>1</sup>

The essence of Haldane's thinking was set down in a series of memoranda composed during his first year in office. In the second of these, dated 1 February 1906, he expressed the view that

the basis of our whole military fabric must be the development of the idea of a real national army, formed of the people and managed by specially organized local Associations.<sup>2</sup>

By April, when the fourth memorandum was written, his thoughts had developed and crystallized. The problem, as he defined it, was

to give the nation what is really a National Army, not separated from itself by artificial barriers of caste and class, but regarded by the people as something that is their very own, and of which they can feel proud as being their very own.<sup>3</sup>

Conceding that the realization of this aim would take many years, he therefore recommended that attention should be concentrated on 'the rising generation'. The county associations, when formed, should 'encourage in every way possible physical training in the schools, Cadet Corps, Miniature Rifle Clubs, and all other means of interesting boys and lads in military exercises'. Boy training, however, should only be part of a complex of military activities whose goal was to equip every citizen, if required, to take his place in the National Army and to meet 'what he must be brought to regard as an engagement of honour'.

1 The question of the non-fulfilment of Haldane's original vision was the subject of the Haldane Memorial lecture, 12 Oct. 1966, by Michael Howard: Lord Haldane and the Territorial Army, printed for Birkbeck College, London, 1966.

2 'Second Memorandum', Haig Papers, 32(a).

3 'Fourth Memorandum', *ibid.*

'As an aid to future discussion', he delineated the future stages of the citizen's military education. The process was to begin in school where the boy would learn physical and military drill carried out under the auspices of the local military authorities. On leaving school he would be given the opportunity of joining a cadet corps, an integral part of the local Territorial Forces, where he would remain until he reached the age of nineteen, whence he would pass into the Territorial Army.

These memoranda demonstrate the completeness of Haldane's conception - he even included a draft attestation form for the Territorial recruit - but this very completeness rendered it vulnerable, for to pare down or discard any of its component parts would be to devitalize the whole structure. Thus the Radical and Labour attack on the cadet corps clauses of the Territorial and Reserve Forces bill, when it came before Parliament, represented a real threat, since Haldane had emphasized the fundamental importance to his scheme of militarizing the young. In April 1907, this opposition, led by Ramsay MacDonald,<sup>1</sup> forced the Secretary of State to modify the clause relating to the use of funds by county associations in support of school cadet corps. Again, on 17 June, the anti-militarist elements showed their strength defeating, by the decisive margin of 304-114, an amendment by Sir Henry Craik to extend military training to those under sixteen.<sup>2</sup> Two days later, Arthur Henderson, speaking for MacDonald, complained that even Haldane's modification had not gone far enough:

Public schools were still to be made the nursery of militarism under official sanction. Once the principle was admitted in regard to public schools, pressure would be brought to bear to extend the military training to the higher grade schools, and then to the elementary schools. <sup>3</sup>

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1 23 Apr. 1907, Hansard, 4th ser., CLXXII. 1600-01.

2 *ibid.*, CLXXVI. 241-66.

3 *ibid.*, 532.

In the upper house Lord Roberts lamented the change in what he took to be 'an essential feature in a scheme which aimed at creating a great national force on the basis of voluntary patriotism'.<sup>1</sup> On 9 July the Lords carried an amendment, moved by Lord Methuen, which in effect reversed the decision of the Commons.<sup>2</sup> A clash between the two houses was averted by a compromise amendment, devised by Lord Esher, which read:

provided that no financial assistance out of money voted by Parliament shall be given by an association in respect of any person in a battalion or corps in a school in receipt of a Parliamentary grant until such person has attained the age of sixteen. <sup>3</sup>

The crucial words in this amendment were 'out of money voted by Parliament'; under the previous wording no county association funds, even those privately subscribed, could have been used to promote school cadets. Esher's amendment was accepted by the Lords, whose general opinion was summed up by Roberts' remark that 'half a loaf was better than no bread',<sup>4</sup> and later by the Commons,<sup>5</sup> in spite of the continued opposition of the Labour party.

This episode exemplifies the awkwardness of Haldane's position. On the whole his views on Army reform commanded a more sympathetic response from the National Service League and those who were ostensibly his political opponents than from the Radical wing of the Liberal party and its Labour allies. Indeed, the League journal commented after one of his speeches in 1906 that 'we at first thought we were reading a speech of a member of the National Service League'.<sup>6</sup>

1 25 June, *ibid.*, 1047.

2 *ibid.*, CLXXVII. 1298.

3 18 July, *ibid.*, CLXXVIII. 813. The amendment was pre-arranged between Haldane and Esher: Haldane to Esher, 10 July 1907, Esh. 5/23, f.11.

4 *ibid.*, 820.

5 30 July, *ibid.*, CLXXIX. 914.

6 The speech was on 14 Sept. at Newcastle: N.S.J., I (Oct. 1906), p.53.

Essentially, the former differed from him on the means to be adopted, whereas the latter, averse to military values, repudiated the end itself. Thus Lord Roberts, who had feared the worst from the Liberal Government, had by the late summer of 1906 changed his mind:

With all its shortcomings, I am inclined to think that the present Government would be far more likely to introduce a measure for compulsory training than the last, if it could be induced to see the necessity for it. The last Government remained in office a great deal too long, and became lamentably timid. 1

Col. Gerald Ellison, who was then Haldane's military secretary, has testified that Roberts 'did all he could to help Mr. Haldane in his reforms'.<sup>2</sup> For Roberts, there was no contradiction between assisting the scheme of the Secretary of State and simultaneously campaigning for compulsion. His proprietorial attitude towards the Army caused him to be grateful for any improvement in its organization and efficiency; and he acknowledged to Haldane himself that his scheme was 'better, far better than any scheme that has been put before the country hitherto'.<sup>3</sup>

For his part Haldane was prepared to seek help and advice from any quarter and hoped to achieve his ends through consent. Hence his formation, in May 1906, of a committee under Lord Esher, soon popularly to be known as the 'Duma', to consider the reform of the

1 Roberts to Kitchener, 2 Aug. 1906, Kit. PRO. 30/57/28, f.145.

2 'Reminiscences', part XVIII, The Lancashire Lad. Journal of the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire), (May, 1936), p.53. The amicable relations between Roberts and Haldane have led Stephen Koss (p.98) to claim that Roberts 'launched his agitation for national service not to harry but to help Haldane'. This is not true. Apart from the chronological difficulty - Roberts committed himself to national service before Haldane went to the War Office - the fact is that national service propaganda was a help to Haldane only in a negative sense i.e. he could rally support for his own proposals as an antidote to compulsion.

3 27 June 1907, Hal. 5907, f.171.



Auxiliary Forces. Lord Newton, always one of Haldane's most forth-right critics, claimed that the committee had been packed in order to reach predetermined conclusions.<sup>1</sup> This was not so. The membership of the 'Duma' embraced all shades of opinion,<sup>2</sup> including that of the N.S.L. for Roberts was a member; in fact, it was so representative that there was never any hope of it reaching agreement!

Notwithstanding the kind offices of Roberts and the common ground between himself and the N.S.L., Haldane plainly regarded himself as under no obligation to mince his words on compulsion when he came to present the Territorial and Reserve Forces bill to Parliament. In moving the bill on 4 March 1907 he immediately showed his hand:

We are very keenly conscious that the unsatisfactory state of the forces of the Crown is producing a certain amount of unrest in the public mind; and if that unrest is not allayed the result will be an agitation for what may be unpopular at the moment, but what might become popular under changed circumstances, and what the Government would regard as very disastrous - an organised movement for compulsion. ... we think that if we should succeed in organising a really strong second line we should be throwing up the stoutest intrenchments against attacks in the interests of compulsion, however they might be devised. <sup>3</sup>

Thus his tactics were to rally the disaffected by summoning up the spectre of compulsion.<sup>4</sup>

The debates which followed as the bill wended its way through both houses towards the royal assent were notable for the prominence given to the issue of compulsion. Taking their cue perhaps from the

<sup>1</sup> 14 May 1906, Hansard, 4th ser., CLVII. 117-8.

<sup>2</sup> The members included Sir Howard Vincent, the Duke of Bedford, Lord Lovat, Lord Methuen, Maj. Seely, Robert Johnson, and St. Loe Strachey. In all there were about 45 members.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, 4th ser., CLXX. 507.

<sup>4</sup> He employed the same tactic on his Cabinet colleagues: 'it must be remembered that the more the plan succeeds, the more deeply is conscription buried in the grave', 'Army Estimates. Memorandum for the Cabinet', 23 Nov. 1907, Cab. 37/90/103, p.1.

Secretary of State, few speakers could refrain from alluding to the subject and, as they aired their prejudices, the debates sometimes assumed the character of a symposium on compulsory service. In the speechifying it is possible to discern two distinct and opposed views as to the bearing of compulsion upon the scheme under discussion. The first followed Haldane in regarding the success of the bill as imperative if the wind was to be taken out of the sails of the compulsory service movement,<sup>1</sup> though one member at least did not think that in the event of failure 'the resources of civilization' would be 'exhausted'.<sup>2</sup> The second shared Ramsay MacDonald's suspicion that the scheme 'was perhaps the first step towards that most undesirable end [viz. conscription]'.<sup>3</sup> These digressions cannot have been unpleasing to Haldane, for by diverting attention from his measure they denied to it a closer scrutiny and assured it of an easier passage than might have been anticipated.

A striking feature of the Commons debates was the widespread scepticism and animosity displayed towards the Government's military advisers. The house was not impressed when Sir Edward Grey, speaking for the Government during the second reading, quoted military opinion in support of the scheme.<sup>4</sup> Sir Charles Dilke, who followed Grey, argued that such approval should be discounted since Haldane's predecessor had adduced the same military opinion in favour of his scheme 'in terms equally strong'.<sup>5</sup> What the 'Army Council' really wanted was 'conscription'.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter the 'military experts'<sup>7</sup> were denounced from all sides; criticisms ranged from the accusation that

1 See, for example, Mr. Brodie, 9 Apr. 1907, CLXXII. 164; and Mr. Brace, 23 Apr., *ibid.*, 1616.

2 Mr. McCrae, 9 Apr., *ibid.*, 123.

3 23 Apr., *ibid.*, 1594.

4 9 Apr., *ibid.*, 110.

5 *ibid.*

6 *ibid.*, 114.

7 The terms 'military opinion', 'military advisers', 'distinguished generals', 'army experts', 'War Office' etc. were, with rare exceptions, used indiscriminately throughout the debates.

they commended the present scheme in the expectation that its early collapse would open the way to conscription<sup>1</sup> to the charge that they would confer their professional blessing on any proposals emanating from their political superiors.<sup>2</sup>

On the whole senior Army officers did hanker after compulsion. But this did not automatically make them intriguers or prevent them giving their wholehearted support to Haldane's scheme. Douglas Haig is a case in point. Though he believed that the Swiss system would have been ideal to 'root the Army in the people',<sup>3</sup> he worked hard and loyally to make the Territorial scheme a success. That such views on compulsion as Haig's were common is confirmed by a report on the Haldane scheme prepared in 1906 by a C.I.D. sub-committee which, because of its composition and the nature of its witnesses, can be regarded as highly representative of senior Army opinion.<sup>4</sup> The report began with an admission that it was no part of the committee's function 'to contrast the possible effects of the adoption of Mr. Haldane's proposals with those which might be obtained under a system of compulsion':<sup>5</sup> it ended with the confident assertion that 'Mr. Haldane's scheme, if carried out under such rigid compulsion as is willingly accepted in Switzerland, would create an immense improvement in our military position at small cost to the Exchequer'.<sup>6</sup>

1 For example, Sir Howard Vincent, *ibid.*, 139.

2 A view expressed, surprisingly perhaps, by Ramsay MacDonald, 23 Apr., *ibid.*, 1594.

3 Haig to Ellison (copy), 11 Nov. 1906, Haig Papers, 40(g).

4 'Report of the Sub-Committee appointed by the Prime Minister to consider the scheme of military organization proposed by the Secretary of State for War', 14 Dec. 1906, Cab. 38/12/57. The report was signed by Esher, Lyttelton, French, Ewart and Clarke. Witnesses were Roberts, Methuen, Nicholson, Hamilton, Douglas, Wolfe-Murray, Haig, Mackinnon and Rundle.

5 *ibid.*, p.1.

6 *ibid.*, p.7.

The allusions to Switzerland were not accidental. Because there was no recent British experience of compulsion, the issue had to be debated on both sides by reference to foreign experience; and for the advocates of compulsory service the Swiss system was far and away the most frequently analysed and extolled. Yet the predominance of the Swiss example was not altogether on military grounds. It owed a great deal to the image which the British had of the Swiss as a healthy, prosperous, industrious, freedom-loving people. The coverage given to foreign countries in compulsionist propaganda depended, in the first instance, less upon the details of their systems or their relations with England, than upon the assumed characteristics of their populations. Thus, if a rank order had been drawn up, Germany, in spite of the growing estrangement between the two countries, would probably have been in second place, whereas France, Britain's entente partner but popularly regarded as corrupt and unhygienic, would have been well down the list, on a par perhaps with Italy.

Switzerland also had the advantage of a militia system which imposed a relatively slight burden upon its citizens: recruit courses, increased in 1907,<sup>1</sup> lasted 65 days for infantry, 75 for artillery, and 90 for cavalry, with a subsequent annual training of between 11 and 15 days according to arm. The Norfolk Commission had rejected > the Swiss system because of the insufficiency of the initial training,<sup>2</sup> and it is unlikely that the British Army would have been content with such a short period even when preceded by several years of military drill in schools and cadet corps. The length of time required to train a soldier was a continual source of argument in this period. Lieut.-Col. A.W.A. Pollock had demonstrated to his own satisfaction, and that of the proprietor and editor of the Spectator, J. St. Loe Strachey, in a widely publicized experiment carried out under the aegis

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1 Previously 45 days, infantry; 55, artillery; 80, cavalry.

2 Norfolk, p.15.

of the Spectator in 1906,<sup>1</sup> that the job could be done in six months, a length of time which he himself admitted - this, after all, was the object of the experiment - was considerably shorter than that laid down by 'expert' opinion. Spenser Wilkinson probably came closer to the professional assessment in Britain at Bay (1909) in which he argued the case for a year's continuous training for infantry and field artillery and two years' for cavalry and horse artillery.<sup>2</sup> A complimentary reference to the Swiss system from an Army officer was, therefore, usually less an indication of a desire to see a comparable scheme introduced in England than of a general disposition in favour of compulsion.

A prominent spokesman for the Swiss system in England was the Cambridge historian, G.G. Coulton. In 1900 he published A Strong Army in a Free State - A Study of the Old English and Modern Swiss Militias which aimed at countering the prejudice against compulsion on the grounds that it was un-English and unfit for a free people by proving that 'both of these objections rest on entirely false conceptions - an ignorance of our own history and of contemporary Europe'.<sup>3</sup> Thus a substantial part of the book was devoted to the thesis that the modern Swiss Militia was basically a development of former English practice. The historical argument may have been sound, but a greater return might be expected from an examination of the more tangible present.

It was the latter reasoning which prompted one of the most ambitious of all the National Service League's propaganda exercises. The League had from its early months taken Switzerland as its model and had arranged for speakers to be sent around the country to lecture on the Swiss Militia ('with limelight illustrations from the Swiss

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1 See Appendix, p.246.

2 p. 153.

3 pp.7-8.

manoeuvres').<sup>1</sup> In 1907 it sponsored a twenty-seven strong committee of inquiry to Switzerland which, in the interests of balance, contained Labour and Liberal M.P.s, local government representatives, and trade unionists.<sup>2</sup> The party, accompanied by Lieut.-Col. C. Delmé-Radcliffe, the British military attaché to Switzerland, had a crowded week's programme beginning on 8 September. It included the inspection of training schools, cadet corps, and factories; the observation of troop movements at night; attendance at the autumn manoeuvres; and being presented to the Federal Council.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after its return, the committee issued a brief, undogmatic report to the press, which suggested that there were features of the Swiss organization which might repay careful study. The report was signed by everyone except the five Labour M.P.s who 'owing to their official position' did not feel able to sign any common report.<sup>4</sup>

The next year a detailed account of the Swiss system, arising from the N.S.L. committee of inquiry and written by Delmé-Radcliffe, was published, in conjunction with a description of the Norwegian Militia by J.W. Lewis, under the title A Territorial Army in Being. Lewis' contribution was an abridgement of a report he had been commissioned to prepare by the N.S.L. in the autumn of 1907. Understandably both painted glowing pictures, rejecting most of the arguments commonly urged against compulsory service and even seeing in the existence of the Regular Army, should the system be applied in to Britain, a remedy for what Delmé-Radcliffe called the 'Achilles heel' of a militia army - the weakness and inexperience of its officers and N.C.O.s.<sup>5</sup> Such speculation was unprofitable. Even if it had been

1 N.S.J., I (Feb. 1904), p.68.

2 A list and description of the committee members is in C. Delmé-Radcliffe and J.W. Lewis, A Territorial Army in Being. A Practical Study of the Swiss Militia and the Norwegian Militia (London, 1908).

3 'Programme of the N.S.L. Committee of Enquiry to Switzerland', Hil. Burst-Black Book 1.

4 Letter from Shee, Times, 27 Sept. 1907, p.13.

5 pp.51-2 and p.76.

possible to disregard the totally dissimilar strategic requirements of the parties, both in kind and scale, the project would still have been impracticable. Maj. R.A. Johnson exposed the fallacy in a lecture at the R.U.S.I. in January 1907 at which Haldane took the chair:

An Army on the Swiss model is only possible when the national spirit is strong and healthy, and the willingness to sacrifice personal ease and personal business to the national security permeates all classes of society ... . It is clear, at any rate, to the impartial observer that while the Swiss Army derives many advantages from being based upon universal service, the reasons why it is as formidable a machine for war as it is universally admitted to be are not solely or chiefly due to compulsion. <sup>1</sup>

The argument could have been taken a stage further (and the value judgement discarded); neither the Swiss nor, for that matter, any national army system was transferable because armies inevitably embody the distinctive values and attitudes of the societies which foster them.

The title, A Territorial Army in Being, with its insinuation that the Territorial Army which Haldane was in the process of creating was in some respect deficient, was not without significance in 1908. Nevertheless, League criticism was generally muted during this formative period and the Secretary of State was not confronted with anything approaching the hostility which was to develop from about 1910 onwards. Of course, a few members refused to pull their punches. Lord Newton, for instance, remarked, during the second reading of the Territorial and Reserve Forces bill, alluding to the War Minister, on 'the extraordinary power which oratory and rhetoric, or, as I should prefer to call it, claptrap, still possess over many people'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Swiss Militia System', R.U.S.I. Journal, LI (May, 1907), p.561.

<sup>2</sup> 26 June 1907, Hansard, 4th ser., CLXXVI. 1289.

The restrained and reasonable reaction of the N.S.L. to Haldane's plans was demonstrated in a letter which was issued to the press in April 1907 over the signatures of Roberts and the four vice-presidents, Wellington, Meath, Milner, and Raglan.<sup>1</sup> It was not written in a 'captious or unfriendly spirit'. Indeed the League agreed with Haldane on many points, welcoming the idea of a national army and the principle that it should be properly organized and equipped. However, the 'National Army', they alleged, would be 'neither national nor an army':

On the one hand it will not draw into its ranks any of the classes which fail to serve at present. On the other, it will not be in any sense an army until six months after the emergency has arisen which it is intended to meet.

Some doubt, too, was expressed as to whether the requisite numbers would be forthcoming. Thus the two main criticisms of the League - that enlistment should be compulsory, not voluntary, and that the six months' training should precede, not follow, the outbreak of war - were clearly set out from the start.

Haldane also had a claim on the forbearance of the League in that his scheme was untried and untested, and was therefore entitled to be exempt from premature and obstructive criticism. Already this was effectively the League's policy before it was officially communicated to the membership at the A.G.M. on 24 June 1908, when Lord Roberts, moving the report, disclosed that

After very mature consideration, the Executive Committee had decided that it was better to withhold all detailed criticism of Mr. Haldane's scheme until after the date which Mr. Haldane himself fixed as the time when it would be possible to judge whether it was likely to succeed or not. 2

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1 Dated 3 Apr. 1907, Times, 5 Apr., p.4.

2 Nation in Arms, III (July, 1908), p.156.



The words 'very mature consideration' suggest that the decision was not unanimous. Since its cause was apparently gaining ground, the League could afford to be patient. Lord Esher, though not a member of the N.S.L., was not the only one to harbour doubts about the success of the Haldane scheme. He believed that this 'last chance' for the voluntary system would fail, after which 'we must have a National Army on a compulsory basis'.<sup>1</sup>

It was evident, too, that the framework which Haldane had devised would facilitate the transition to compulsory service. When the War Minister revealed his Territorial design to Parliament, the Westminster Gazette saw the possibility of it becoming 'the house they [the conscriptionists] will occupy',<sup>2</sup> whilst the Saturday Review, more favourably disposed, observed that

it actually provides us with the most admirable and carefully thought-out machinery for introducing at any time a system of compulsion for service at home. Nothing is lacking, and the more closely we examine the plan the more clearly does it appear that all its details are fitted to that end. 3

The National Service League was soon to register its agreement. A committee had been formed in 1906 to prepare a detailed scheme of compulsory service which the League could put before the public. The main task was entrusted to Sir Coleridge Grove.<sup>4</sup> His scheme, having been subjected to a great deal of discussion and revision,<sup>5</sup>

1 Esher to Kitchener (copy), 4 Oct. 1906, Esh. 4/1, f.40.

2 5 Mar. 1907, p.1.

3 2 Mar. 1907, p.256.

4 It is uncertain when Grove began work, but there is in Mil.135 a typed, undated draft 'Scheme of Compulsory Service drawn up by Sir Coleridge Grove', which was forwarded to Milner on 20 Aug. 1906.

5 Compare the 1906 draft with the later 'Scheme for a System of Compulsory Military Training applied to Mr. Haldane's Proposals', printed by the N.S.L. but undated, in Mil.137, a copy of which, dated '6.4.07', in Grove's handwriting, is in Rob. WO.105/45. Also in Mil.137 are 'Amery's Criticisms', again undated, and Grove's 'Notes on Mr. Amery's Criticisms of the Scheme before the Committee'.

was near completion by the summer of 1907. Then, on 14 June, Capt. Crosfield presented a memorandum<sup>1</sup> to the committee which argued the case for associating the League with Haldane's bill by pressing for service to be universal and the training to precede an emergency. Such a course would link the League's proposals with a bill which was shortly to become law, would secure the support of the Auxiliary Forces, and would have the advantage of simplicity. He regretted taking this line in view of the hard work which had gone into the Grove scheme, with which he was personally 'in accord', but considered that it would be 'politically inadvisable to publish'. The committee accepted Crosfield's reasoning.<sup>2</sup> Poor Grove - to have laboured so long only to be pre-empted by the Secretary of State! Nevertheless it was a wise decision for Grove's unwieldy and complicated ideas could not have stood comparison with Haldane's imaginative construction.

Yet Haldane's conception had one inherent weakness: in creating the Territorial Army and assigning to the new county associations the administrative responsibility for the second line, he had been forced to involve the services of those who were, in the main, politically opposed to him. At first this appeared to be a master-stroke:

To induce a Radical Parliament [wrote Repington] to vote in a phalanx for such a conservative measure is a masterpiece. When I see C-B's following voting solid for placing the whole administration of the popular forces in the hands of the Lord Lieutenants and county families & senior officers I cannot help laughing! 3

In addition, to strengthen the county associations, the support of the King was enlisted. Edward VII received the lords lieutenant on 26 October 1907 and charged and commanded them (in a speech drafted by the Secretary of State) 'to be attentive to ... [their] new duties and to

1 'Memo. by Capt. Crosfield circulated at Committee Meeting 14 June 1907', Mil.137.

2 Roberts' speech at A.G.M., 26 June 1907, Nation in Arms, II (July, 1907), p.179.

3 to Balfour, 3 June 1907, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49859, f.139.

spare neither time nor pains' to make the organization a success.<sup>1</sup> The royal appeal disarmed the National Service League. Thirteen of the lords lieutenant received by the King were members of the League 'and in most cases Presidents of the local Branches in their counties'.<sup>2</sup> Besides, the League prided itself on its patriotism and many of its members were keen Volunteers, likely to play a prominent part in the new Territorial Army. The clash of loyalties was partially resolved by a circular sent out to honorary secretaries in December 1907.<sup>3</sup> Haldane was praised for engaging, through the county associations, 'the forces of local patriotism and tradition in the cause of national defence'. Accordingly the branches were advised

not to stand aloof, but rather to assist and support these Associations as good in themselves, easily adaptable to a system of universal compulsory training, and calculated to make that system rather a development of existing institutions than an abrupt departure from the military traditions to which the people of this country have been accustomed.

The short-term effectiveness of Haldane's tactic is not in doubt. In February 1909, the Earl of Warwick, Lord Lieutenant of Essex and president of the Essex branch of the N.S.L., refused an invitation from Major Hilder, the secretary, to speak at a League meeting:

I think it inadvisable for me at the present moment [he wrote] when we are making great efforts to make the Territorial Association a success to take a prominent part in the League. ... Moreover His Majesty has called upon me as his representative in the County to do my best in support of the Territorial Association, ... 4

In the long term the scheme was to founder because this support was not sustained; and, though the N.S.L. was blamed for undermining the Territorial Army, the real cause was the tepid and sparse collaboration

1 Copy of draft speech, Hal.5907, fs.246-8.

2 Nation in Arms, II (Dec. 1907), p.296.

3 6 Dec., signed George F. Shee, Rob.122.

4 25 Feb., Hil. Blue-Red Book 67.

of those who professed the same political allegiance as the scheme's originator.

There was, however, one feature of Haldane's plan which did not escape severe criticism - the proposal to create 196 batteries of Territorial Artillery. At the same time it reopened the thorny question of the Government's military advisers. The attack was launched in the Commons, on 11 March 1908, by Arthur Lee supported, amongst others, by Sir Charles Dilke.<sup>1</sup> The next day Viscount Midleton initiated a debate in the Lords on the strength of the Army in which he was severely critical of the reduction in the numbers of Regulars and especially in the Regular Artillery.<sup>2</sup> Later in the same debate, Lord Roberts, confining himself to the artillery question, protested against 'the absurdly small amount of training' the batteries were to receive and warned that 'to trust to amateur artillerists would be to court disaster'.<sup>3</sup> Others followed him both then and when the debate was resumed four days later. No part of the Secretary of State's plans had, to date, come in for such sweeping condemnation. The criticisms, voiced in the Lords and elsewhere, came to the notice of the King, who was abroad at the time. Since, as far as he could judge, he made known to Haldane, they 'were not made from party motives, but solely from a technical and military point of view', he trusted that the training would be modified 'in accordance with expert military opinion'.<sup>4</sup> Haldane's reply assured the King that the system was based on expert advice.<sup>5</sup> Throughout, the Secretary of State was able to stand firm because of the support of his military advisers. When, on 19 March, Arthur Lee had challenged him to cite

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1 Hansard, 4th ser., CLXXXV. 1554-75.

2 *ibid.*, 1658-70.

3 *ibid.*, 1685, 1687.

4 Arthur Davidson to Haldane, 24 Mar. 1908, Hal. 5908, fs.9-11.

5 30 Mar. 1908, *ibid.*, fs.13-14.

'the opinions of any eminent or practical soldiers' in favour of the artillery proposals,<sup>1</sup> he was able to respond immediately by reading out three letters, from Sir John French, Sir Neville Lyttelton and the Army Council, and Douglas Haig!<sup>2</sup> The last-named, who provided him with his strongest support,<sup>3</sup> deprecated 'any change in the policy of creating a 2nd line Army complete in all arms and services'.<sup>4</sup>

The suspicion remained that Haldane had seduced his advisers into expressing opinions which were not genuinely their own. On 21 April 1908, an order, issued by Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton to the troops of the Southern Command, in which he gave examples of good work done by artillery units raised on a non-professional basis, was printed in the Times.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Hamilton requested the assistance of retired Regular Artillery officers for the Territorial batteries until competent commanders could be evolved from the Force itself and appealed to the regular officers 'to hold out the hand of military camaraderie to their new brothers in arms'. The same day Roberts addressed a letter to Hamilton.<sup>6</sup> He quite understood Hamilton's desire to help in Haldane's scheme, he said, but the country could not afford to 'trust to any artillery but the best'. Consequently, he hoped there would be no response to Hamilton's appeal and that the Regiment would resist the introduction of amateur artillery.

Our old friendship, my dear Johnnie, [he continued] and my jealousy of your deservedly high name as a soldier, are my reasons for writing you this letter ... Haldane would never have ventured to take so momentous a step, (or to have persisted in it), as the formation of these Territorial Batteries were he not able to say that he has the support of soldiers like yourself, ...

1 Hansard, 4th ser., CLXXXVI. 835.

2 ibid., 846-9.

3 See 'Notes on certain letters written at various times by the late Field-Marshal Earl Haig to Lieut.-Gen. Sir Gerald Ellison', 11 Sept. 1928, Haig Papers, 40(g).

4 (copy), 18 Mar. 1908, Haig Papers, 40(g).

5 p.12.

6 (copy), Rob. 122/10/298.

Two years later this disagreement was to have an even more unhappy sequel.<sup>1</sup>

The Artillery was a highly specialized branch of the Army. Haldane admitted that the Territorial Artillery would not be ready immediately on the outbreak of war and, therefore, sufficient regular troops to ensure national safety would have to be kept back until the second line hardened into efficiency.<sup>2</sup> Now, the plan to retain Regular Artillery while the Territorial batteries were being brought up to standard - and Roberts thought it impossible to train such a mass of men in six months in summertime, let alone in winter<sup>3</sup> - was not confined to the Artillery, but applied to the Territorial Force in general. The Opposition seized on this point. If regular troops were to be kept at home in any numbers, Lansdowne asked, 'what becomes of the scheme of the Government to be able to send away from this country, at a moment's notice, a larger and better equipped force than any Government has ever been able to command?'<sup>4</sup> The truth was that the Government never really had the courage of its Blue-Water convictions. In 1907-8 the invasion question was revived. During its first year and a half in office the excessively optimistic hopes which the Government had placed in the Hague Conference had induced a mood of complacency. Lord Tweedmouth, the First Lord of the Admiralty, in an arrogant speech, during a debate on home defence in the Lords in February 1907, had castigated the 'alarmists and scaremongers' and denied that there was at that time 'a shadow of difference' between Britain and the other great powers.<sup>5</sup> The Government was brought down to earth by Bulow's speech in the

1 See below, chapt. V, pp.174-5.

2 19 Mar. 1908, Hansard, 4th ser., CLXXXVI. 840-1.

3 18 May 1908, ibid., CLXXXVIII.1546.

4 ibid., 1583.

5 18 Feb. 1907, ibid., CLXIX.516.

Reichstag on 30 April which denounced projects for arms limitation and the announcement in the following November of an amendment to the 1900 Navy law. The stage was set for the intensification of Anglo-German naval rivalry.

Previous official pronouncements on invasion had presupposed the hostility of France. The emergence of a new and potentially more formidable adversary in Germany was the pretext for the reinvestigation of the problem which Sir Samuel Scott, Lord Roberts, Lord Lovat and Col. Repington, managed, through the agency of Lansdowne and Balfour, to get the Government to consent to in the summer of 1907. Because of the participation of Roberts, and the fact that his name carried more weight than his associates', it has been assumed that the reopening of the invasion question was largely instigated by the National Service League, in order to discredit the Territorial Army and thereby secure the acceptance of the compulsory alternative.<sup>1</sup> Although the League was vitally interested in resisting the unqualified assertion that invasion was impossible, the fact was, as Roberts pointed out at the beginning of his evidence before the C.I.D. sub-committee, that the other three members of the quartet did not belong to the N.S.L., but were 'in the main, supporters of the scheme of the Secretary of State for War, so far as the Territorial Army is concerned'.<sup>2</sup> It is instructive that the disclaimer should have been necessary.

In fact, Repington, who had championed the Secretary of State's scheme with such conspicuous enthusiasm that Arthur Lee had dubbed him Haldane's 'Fidus Achates',<sup>3</sup> appears to have been the prime mover.

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1 See, for example, Hayes, p.52; Williamson, p.97; and more recently John Gooch, The Plans of War. The General Staff and British Military Strategy c.1900-1916 (London, 1974), p.284.

2 'Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed by the Prime Minister to re-consider the Question of Oversea Attack', 22 Oct. 1908, Cab. 16/3A, p.2.

3 9 Apr. 1907, Hansard, 4th ser., CLXXII. 181.

Certainly Sir John Fisher believed that he was behind the agitation and that the others were 'puppets' in his hands.<sup>1</sup> For his part, in a letter to Moberly Bell, the managing director of the Times, Repington claimed that he was responsible for bringing the four men together.<sup>2</sup> At the same time he complained that he had 'not had one syllable of Editorial support' from the Times in his campaign; but as the military correspondent of that newspaper, he could, and did of course, parade his views in its columns. On the other hand, Lovat's biographer and brother-in-law asserts that it was he who took the initiative in forming the 'small informal committee'.<sup>3</sup> Lovat, chief of the Clan Fraser, was a firm believer in the voluntary system. He had raised 'Lovat's Scouts' for service in the South African War and was soon to show himself an energetic and diligent Territorialist. However, he did not possess the same drive or capacity for scheming as Repington; so, whoever inaugurated the project, Repington was undoubtedly its mainstay.

The group worked assiduously collecting evidence, first to establish the case for an inquiry and then, when this was conceded, to put before the sub-committee itself. The expenses of this enterprise which ran into several thousand pounds, were met by Scott.<sup>4</sup> Information was assembled on all conceivable aspects of the problem; the distribution of troops in Germany, the railway lines which served the North Sea ports, the tonnage of shipping available under normal circumstances, the depth of water in which merchant ships could anchor, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Details of the Admiralty's counter-measures, including the distribution of British ships in home waters, were made

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1 Fisher to Esher, 8 Nov. 1907, Esh. 10/42.

2 4 Dec. 1907, The History of the Times. The Twentieth Century Test 1884-1912 (London, 1947), p.843.

3 Sir Francis Lindley, Lord Lovat. A Biography (London, n.d.), p.114.

4 Esher to Knollys (copy), 6 Nov. 1908, Esh. 19/6, f.51.

5 See Repington to Roberts, 30 Oct. 1907, Rob. 62/13, and 5 Nov. 1907, Rob. 62/16.



available confidentially by the group's contacts within the service such as Beresford and Sturdee.<sup>1</sup>

The latter were clearly animated by an eagerness to discredit Fisher, the First Sea Lord; but what, if the obvious explanation that the four men were united only in an honest belief that the country was exposed to a grave risk of invasion is discounted, was the underlying motive of Roberts, Scott, Lovat, and Repington? They were not acting on behalf of the National Service League, nor of the Unionist party. The only explanation is that, unconsciously perhaps at first, but more deliberately later, they represented the interests of the Auxiliary Forces. The small group, which had originally met to ventilate the question of invasion, had expanded in the summer of 190 into the National Defence Association.<sup>2</sup> Monthly dinners were held at which papers were read by 'selected individuals'; Balfour, Haldane, Dilke, Lyttelton and William Nicholson were amongst those who attended. (On 7 May 1907, at the 10th meeting of the Association, Lovat, who attacked the Blue-Water school, and Repington, who held forth on German naval policy, were able to rehearse their arguments on invasion.)<sup>3</sup> Sir George Taubman Goldie became president of the Association and Robert Johnson, hon. secretary. Roberts, Repington, Lovat, and Scott were members of the executive committee.<sup>4</sup>

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1 *ibid.*, 22 Oct., Rob. 62/12; and Beresford to Repington (copy), 17 Nov. 1907, Rob. 62/23.

2 St. George's Review. The Organ of the National Defence Association (May, 1908), p.8., contains information in short article 'Lest We Forget' by Taubman Goldie on the origins of the N.D.A. The agreement with the proprietors of St. George's Review was terminated in July 1908 and from November the Association published its own monthly, National Defence.

3 'Proceedings of the National Defence Association. No.IV. The Problem of Invasion', (printed), Mil. 133.

4 St. George's Review (May, 1908), p.92.

As the Territorial Army took shape the Association became its mouthpiece; significantly it shared offices with the Council of the Territorial Force Associations. The A.G.M. held on 18 November 1907 unanimously passed a resolution that 'the proposed organisation of the Territorial Army deserves the loyal support of every patriotic man'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, loyalty and patriotism could not alter, and may perhaps have determined, the 'settled conviction'<sup>2</sup> of the Association that invasion was possible. Paradoxically, sufficient recruitment for the Territorial Army was conditional upon the wholesale rejection of one of its basic premises, for the greatest inducement to men to join - as it had been with the Volunteers - was the consciousness that they might be required to defend their hearths and homes. Under these circumstances, Haldane had an appreciable stake in the continuing dissension.

The same underlying tensions, evident in the relations between the National Service League and the Territorial Army, were soon to emerge between the League and the N.D.A. The president set out the Association's objections to the N.S.L. in May 1908.<sup>3</sup> The concentration on one specific point, he declared, had 'two inevitable results': first, it inclined opponents of the League and the uncommitted alike 'to disregard any proposition it may advance' whether it was connected with compulsory service or not; and secondly, it detracted from 'the vital necessity of making the best of the voluntary system pending the conversion of the electorate'. The Association did reckon among its membership a number who were well-disposed towards compulsion; but, according to Repington,

as practical men of affairs, they are not content to revolve in a circle until this change is brought about, ... They realize, as the National Service League has insufficiently realized, that the Territorial Force must be the foundation upon which national training in future must be based; ...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>2</sup> *National Defence* (Dec. 1908), p.106.

<sup>3</sup> 'Notes by the President', *St. George's Review* (May, 1908), pp.91-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Times*, 18 Jan. 1908, p.5.

The two bodies were manifestly incompatible. In October 1907, Lord Roberts, who was in fact the only prominent League member on the executive committee of the N.D.A., had asked for his name to be removed from the list of the Association's members because of the 'antagonistic' stand it was taking against the N.S.L.<sup>1</sup> The matter was apparently smoothed over, because the St. George's Review of May 1908 included Roberts' name in the list of committee members, and the 'Notes by the President' contained a paragraph acknowledging the part he had played in forming the Association.<sup>2</sup> However, his name was absent from the July issue, as was the paragraph about him in the president's notes, which were otherwise reprinted in full.<sup>3</sup>

The invasion issue, over which the two bodies did see eye to eye, was kept simmering by the publication of innumerable fictitious accounts of invasion which were both a cause and a symptom of public anxiety. This particular literary genre had been developed in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century and was a European, not an exclusively English, phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, to ascribe the periodical invasion panics to the activities of the National Service League was unjust; the most that can be said is that the League exploited and exacerbated them. The publications are difficult to characterize. Some were of literary merit,<sup>5</sup> most were potboilers,

1 Roberts to Sir Samuel Scott (copy), 21 Oct. 1907, Rob. 122/10/176.

2 p.92.

3 On 22 Oct. 1908 Roberts told Taubman Goldie that he had come to regard the N.D.A. as 'a positive danger to the country, inasmuch as it encourages the belief that 300,000 men, with scarcely any training will suffice to ensure its safety': (copy), Rob. 122/11/18.

4 The best account of this literature is I.F. Clarke, Voices Prophesying War (London, 1966).

5 For example, Erskine Childers, The Riddle of the Sands (London, 1903), and 'Saki' (H.H. Munro), When William Came. The Story of London under the Hohenzollerns (London, 1913).

one at least was satirical;<sup>1</sup> but they tended to portray invasion in the most lurid and graphic detail, though invariably the nation was saved at the eleventh hour by the timely intervention of a friendly power or some unforeseen (and non-recurrrable!) circumstance.<sup>2</sup> One thing they did have in common was that, with 'rare exceptions', they completely failed 'to foresee the form a modern war would take'.<sup>3</sup> Roberts did imprudently become involved with the most bizarre and bogus of the authors, William le Queux, by contributing a preface to his work The Great War in England in 1897<sup>4</sup> and acting as a consultant for The Invasion of 1910, which was sponsored by Lord Northcliffe and first published in serial form in the Daily Mail in 1906.<sup>5</sup> Still, the help was not given in his official capacity as president of the N.S.L.; the League preferred on the whole to deal with the facts - as it saw them.

The main danger to the League, which its stand on invasion and Roberts' role in procuring the C.I.D. inquiry posed, was that it would acquire a reputation for being hostile to the Royal Navy. This it had always been at great pains to avoid, and its published aims had regularly stressed the supreme importance of the Navy.<sup>6</sup> In addition, its early programmes had allowed for compulsion to apply equally for the Army and Navy,<sup>7</sup> an exercise which was aimed more at projecting

1 P.G. Wodehouse, The Swoop! or How Clarence Saved England: A Tale of the Great Invasion, see Hynes, pp.48-9.

2 For example, Anon., The New Battle of Dorking (London, 1900).

3 Clarke, p.68.

4 (London, 1893).

5 Hynes, p.40. This work 'caused such a fuss that the Kaiser ordered the General and Admiralty Staffs to make formal reports on each instalment', Jonathan Steinberg, 'The Copenhagen Complex', Journal of Contemporary History, I (July, 1966), p.40.

6 For example, 'Objects of the League', N.S.J., I (Nov. 1903), p.3; and 'Some Objects of the League', ibid., II (Nov. 1905).

7 See two programmes of proposals, N.S.J., I (Feb. 1904) and (Sept. 1904).

an image of impartiality than at promoting naval efficiency, for the Navy did not encounter the same acute recruiting problem as the Army, and, in any case, a considerably longer period than the few months offered was required to train a sailor. However, its most effective defence, especially against the charge that compulsory service would undermine the strength of the Royal Navy, was, as the League fully understood, a numerous and distinguished naval membership. To some extent this was achieved. When, at the end of 1907, the invasion inquiry, which unavoidably directed attention towards the effects of compulsory service on the Navy, began, the League was able to publish a list of thirty admirals who were members.<sup>1</sup> By the summer of 1908 the number had risen to thirty-five.<sup>2</sup> The Navy had always been well represented on the executive committee of the League;<sup>3</sup> and in June 1909 Sir Gerald Noel became the first admiral to be elected a vice-president. Many of these men were retired, but their judgement was not impaired by encroaching senility. In some respects retired officers, from both services, provided a more reliable measure of opinion than those on the active list, who were naturally inhibited by their expectations of employment and promotion.

Since compulsory service could only be enforced for home defence, the principal responsibility for which had been assigned to the Navy, the League had to be wary lest the case which it put forward in any way impugned the bravery or calibre of naval personnel. Therefore, the contingencies it advanced, in which the home army might be called into service, were those which could not reasonably be guarded against - the sudden attack of a second power when the Navy was already engaged

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1 Nation in Arms, II (Dec. 1907), p.288.

2 'Full Members of National Service League', typed list sent by Roberts to Balfour, 2 July 1908, Bal. B.M. Add. MSS. 49725, fs.281-2.

3 In 1904, for example, Admiral Sir N. Bowden-Smith and Vice-Admiral W.F.S. Mann were members of an executive committee of eleven: N.S.J., I (Nov. 1904).

in war, abnormal weather conditions, etc. Above all, the League emphasized the complementary nature of its proposals: far from usurping the Navy's role, a strong home-defence army would free it for its proper strategic functions;<sup>1</sup> no longer would it have to remain 'tethered like a goat'<sup>2</sup> to home waters. Thus the strategic freedom of the Navy, no less than that of the Expeditionary Force, was held to be hampered by the lack of an adequate home-defence army.

Of course, the conclusion could just as easily have been drawn that, if the country was open to invasion, then the correct solution was not to raise a home-defence army through compulsion, but build more ships; and since it was easier to drum up public and parliamentary support for increased expenditure on the Navy than on the Army, the latter was the more probable course for the Government to adopt. 'An Invasion Scare', Esher reminded Sir John Fisher in October 1907, 'is the mill of God which grinds you out a Navy of Dreadnoughts'.<sup>3</sup> The argument carried little weight with the First Sea Lord.

Fisher was violently opposed to the invasion inquiry. When, in spite of his protests, the inquiry was conceded, he determined to 'smash it [invasion bogey] completely this time'.<sup>4</sup> To this end a substantial body of evidence was collected under the direction of Rear-Admiral E.J. Slade (D.N.I.) to which, amongst others, Julian Corbett and Capt. P.H. Colomb contributed.<sup>5</sup> The Admiralty's case against invasion was a strong one: it was based on the overall command of the sea, which would render the operation so hazardous that only the most reckless enemy would dare undertake it and ensure that,

1 'Objects of the League', N.S.J., I (Nov. 1903), p.4.

2 Milner to Roberts, 10 Jan. 1908, Rob. 45/93. The phrase was not Milner's special property; it was widely used in these years.

3 1 Oct. 1907 (copy), Esh. 10/42.

4 Fisher to Balfour, 29 Nov. 1907, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49712, f.21.

5 See correspondence between Corbett and Slade, Cor. Box 6.

in the improbable event of an army being landed, it could not be sustained. Furthermore, it was argued, if the command of the sea was lost, Britain could be defeated without any invasion being launched.<sup>1</sup>

However, the intensity of Fisher's reaction to the invasion inquiry - even when allowance is made for his penchant for hyperbole - signifies that for him much more was at stake than the *simple matter of invasion*. In the first place, he regarded the agitation as a personal attack on himself and his policies:

Why, the whole business of the Admiralty for the last three years [he told Clarke] has been to concentrate our Sea Force in such a preponderating mass in Home Waters as absolutely to preclude the faintest possibility of an invasion or even of a raid! 2

In this connection, it would not have escaped his attention that a number of the most ardent members of the anti-Fisher lobby, including Admirals Lord Charles Beresford, C. Penrose FitzGerald, and Sir Edmund Fremantle were active members of the National Service League. Secondly, he felt that the unstated motive of those who pressed for the inquiry was a fundamental redistribution of resources and power as between the Army and the Navy. Here, his legitimate concern for the interests of the Navy was compounded by a peevish and perverse attitude towards the Army and its generals, whom he classed as 'nincompoops'.<sup>3</sup> More sensibly he never tired of proclaiming that 'Every penny spent on the Army is a penny taken from the Navy'.<sup>4</sup> This was the crux of the matter. The service estimates were interdependent, as the Army had frequently found to its cost. A victory for the invasionists and, in their wake, the compulsionists would

1 Arthur J. Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow. I The Road to War 1904-1914 (London, 1961), pp.346-7.

2 12 Sept. 07, Arthur J. Marder (ed.), Fear God and Dread Nought. The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone II Years of Power 1904-1914 (London, 1956), p.132.

3 Fisher to Arnold White, 25 Dec. 1904, *ibid.*, p.50.

4 One occasion was in 'Notes for Consideration', Nov. 1903, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49710, f.49.

almost certainly have led to the demand for a reduction in the Navy estimates. As a consequence, not only would the Navy's status as the senior service have been threatened, but also the amphibious offensive strategy to which it was committed, for the Army would then have balked at being 'a projectile to be fired by the Navy!'<sup>1</sup>

The sub-committee held sixteen meetings between November 1907 and July 1908. The hearings were tense and acrimonious, Tweedmouth, the First Lord of the Admiralty, being especially offensive.<sup>2</sup> It reported in October. Its final conclusions were a vindication of the Government's military and naval policy, which was not surprising given the composition of the sub-committee:<sup>3</sup>

1. That so long as our naval supremacy is assured against any reasonably probable combination of Powers, invasion is impracticable.
2. That if we permanently lose command of the sea, whatever may be the strength and organization of the Home Force, the subjection of the country to the enemy is inevitable.
3. That our army for Home defence ought to be sufficient in numbers and organization not only to repel small raids, but to compel an enemy who contemplates invasion to come with so substantial a force as will make it impossible for him to evade our fleets.
4. That in order to insure an ample margin of safety such a force may, for purposes of calculation, be assumed to be 70,000 men.

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1 Another of Fisher's favourite expressions. In a letter to the King, 4 Oct. 1907, he attributed it to Sir Edward Grey, Fear God and Dread Nought II, p.143; but he'd been using the expression for years (see, to Esher, 19 Nov. 1903, *ibid.*, I, p.291) and if it did originate with Grey, Fisher had made it his own.

2 Esher Journal (copy), 13 Dec. 1907, Esh. 2/10, f.34.

3 'Minutes of 100th Meeting. (Report of the Sub-Committee on Invasion.)', Cab. 38/14/10, pp.1-2. The members of the sub-committee were: Asquith (chairman), Lloyd George, Grey, Tweedmouth, McKenna, Haldane, Crewe, Esher, Fisher, Slade, Lyttelton, Nicholson, French, Ewart, Ottley (sec.).



5. That, in the event of our being engaged in a war in the frontier of India which required 100,000 regular troops to be sent from the United Kingdom during the first year, the new organization of the army at Home will secure that there will be left in this country during the first six months a sufficient number of regular and other troops to deal with a force of 70,000 men.
6. That, on the assumption that the Territorial force is embodied on the outbreak of war, there will also be, after the expiration of six months, a sufficient number of regulars and trained Territorials to make it practically certain that no enemy will attempt the operation with a smaller force than that assumed above.

The C.I.D. had reported, but the issue had not been resolved. Indeed, the inquiry seems to have exasperated rather than mollified the invasionists. Within two days of the report being issued Roberts had decided to raise another debate on invasion in the Lords.<sup>1</sup> Once again, in company with Repington, Scott and Lovat, he prevailed upon Balfour to act as intermediary. What they wanted was an official Government statement of the conclusions arrived at by the C.I.D. inquiry, for which they cited Balfour's own statement in 1905 as precedent. The leader of the Opposition passed on their request, though he told them frankly that in his judgement 'any statement on National Defence on the broad lines adopted in 1905, could not be made now without bringing the military and naval relations of Germany and Great Britain into prominence'.<sup>2</sup> They received the same counsel from Lansdowne,<sup>3</sup> and two days before the debate an appeal, addressed to Roberts and Lovat, from Lord Crewe, the Lord Privy Seal, 'to omit from your speeches references and allusions which would be very undesirable from an international point of view'.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Roberts to Lansdowne (copy), 24 Oct. 1908, Rob. 122/11/19.

2 Balfour to Asquith (copy) 5 Nov. 1908, Rob. 8/29.

3 Lansdowne to Roberts, 18 Nov. 1908, Rob. 34/469.

4 Crewe to Roberts, 21 Nov. 1908, Rob. 46/154.

Scorning this advice, on 23 November, Roberts moved:

That in the opinion of this House the defence of these Islands necessitates the immediate attention of His Majesty's Government to the provision (in addition to a powerful Navy) of an Army so strong in numbers and so efficient in quality that the most formidable foreign nation would hesitate to attempt a landing on these shores, ... and that in the opinion of this House it is desirable, in view of altered strategic conditions in the North Sea, that His Majesty's Government should, following the precedent set by Mr. Balfour in 1905, make a statement on the invasion problem, and should state definitely the conclusions arrived at as a result of the recent inquiry by the Committee of Imperial Defence. 1

The speech which followed was the most alarmist and incautious he had ever delivered, revealing the details of the committee's researches, and particularly indiscreet in its references to Germany:

It is calculated that there are 80,000 Germans in the United Kingdom, almost all of them trained soldiers. They work many of the hotels at some of the chief railway stations, and if a German force once got into this country it would have the advantage of help and reinforcement such as no other army on foreign soil has ever before enjoyed. 2

Lovat supported him, but there was insufficient backing for the whole resolution; so Roberts withdrew the last part, which had been intended to force the Government to disclose the results of the inquiry. In its final, truncated form, by which time it was no more than a platitude, the motion was agreed to 74-32.<sup>3</sup>

The early years of the Liberal Government witnessed a perceptible growth of tension over national defence. This was less the result of policy than of new and threatening international circumstances which

1 Hansard, 4th ser., CXCVI. 1679.

2 ibid., 1690-1.

3 Roberts' speech brought a strong reprimand from the King via Probyn. What His Majesty most objected to was the timing - he was due to visit Berlin in a few months! 27 Nov. 1908, Rob. 53/258.

induced **d**iscord, because the traditional remedies, which appeared obsolete to some, were sacrosanct to others. The position called for cool, rational debate: instead prejudices were gradually being sharpened until the nation was on the verge of an emotional and sterile stalemate. The movement for national service was to be both beneficiary and victim of this situation.

CHAPTER IV

The report presented to the Annual General Meeting of the National Service League on 30 June 1909 revealed that the membership had nearly doubled over the previous twelve months and had reached 31,779.<sup>1</sup> The same period had also seen the formation of 17 new branches. Encouraged by this progress, the League decided to sponsor a parliamentary bill. In the years before 1914 five bills were introduced into Parliament for national service or universal training,<sup>2</sup> but only that of 1909 was officially sanctioned by the League. The willingness to put its principles to the test of parliamentary opinion (albeit that of the Lords rather than the Commons) was indicative of a confidence and optimism which were to prove shortlived. Although membership again nearly doubled in 1909-10, the rate of increase thereafter was much reduced.<sup>3</sup> At the same time there was a marked change in the mood of the movement, brought about by a series of frustrations and disappointments which were mainly political in character. In part the League had raised expectations by underestimating the political difficulties. Now a reaction set in, and by 1911 the buoyant hopes and reasonableness of 1909 were giving way to increasing cynicism and bitterness.

The expansion of the N.S.L. in 1908-9 and the determination to exploit the apparently propitious circumstances necessitated a corresponding increase in salaried officials. Until 1909, apart from the

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1 N.S.L. 'Report and Balance Sheet 1908'.

2 By Capt. Kincaid-Smith (Commons, 1908), Roberts (Lords, 1909), Col. Sandys (Commons, 1913), Viscount Galway (Lords, 1913), and Lord Willoughby de Broke (Lords, 1914).

3 In March 1910 it was 61,919; in March 1911 it had reached 91,142 and it settled around this figure. In 1913 it was still only 96,526. Reports of A.G.M.s in *Nation in Arms*: V (Aug. 1910), p.355; VI (Aug. 1911), p.405; VII (Midsummer, 1913), p.365.

headquarters staff, the League had relied mainly on volunteer workers. Thus the network of branches were uneven and unstable, frequently dependent on the hard work, enthusiasm or local prestige of one man: a Capt. Kindersley in Devon, a Capt. Grosfield in Warrington, or a Major Hilder in Essex. The collapse of the St. Helens branch, for instance, the second to be formed in 1904, followed closely upon the death in 1908 of its president and main inspiration, Col. R. Pilkington.<sup>1</sup>

A prime example of the influence which an individual could exert is afforded by the work of Major Frank Hilder in Essex. Having made his fortune on the Stock Exchange by his mid-thirties, he was able to set himself up as a country gentleman at Ingatestone and devote himself to the causes and pursuits, largely patriotic and equestrian, which interested him.<sup>2</sup> He was, not unexpectedly therefore, a keen Yeomanry and then Territorial officer, raising a battery of horse artillery in his home county in 1908. He and his wife were joint honorary secretaries of the Essex branch of the N.S.L. which was founded in 1907. Undoubtedly he provided the driving force behind the growth of the branch which within a few years had become the largest in the country.<sup>3</sup> Essex published its own monthly journal, The Patriot, price 1d, which Hilder subsidized. Indeed his money was given as generously as his time: there is a note in his papers

- 1 N.S.L. 'Report and Balance Sheet 1908', p.32, commenting on the fact that for the second year running no report had been received from St. Helens expressed the fear that Pilkington would prove an 'irreparable loss'.
- 2 The nature of his interests is reflected in his papers and confirmed by his son, Major Thomas Hilder, who was able to provide additional personal information.
- 3 By the summer of 1912 there were 53 sub-branches with over 15,000 supporters and adherents: The Patriot, IV (July, 1912), pp.8-13.

in his own handwriting assessing his total contribution to the national service movement 1907-12 at £4,504.<sup>1</sup> No wonder the League awarded him its gold medal in 1910!<sup>2</sup>

Hilder was a living denial of the charge that the League was hostile to the Territorial Force; he was, in his own words, 'a Territorial Officer first and a National Service Leaguerer [sic] afterwards'.<sup>3</sup> Besides, the League was not for him simply an instrument for strengthening the reserve forces. The Essex journal, significantly titled, reflected his conception of it as a local focus for a whole range of essentially 'patriotic' activities and organizations: it included a scout column, Territorial news, and details of rifle shooting competitions for which Hilder often donated prizes. Though his zeal, the mark of the arriviste perhaps, was unusual, Hilder's views were typically those of the county circles in which he moved. They are a reminder that the preoccupations of League members were by no means exclusively strategic.

Not every branch, of course, had a Hilder, and even he (with the help of his private secretary) would have been unable to cope with the increasing burden of administration which resulted from the growth of numbers. Therefore, during the course of 1909-10 organizing secretaries were appointed to nearly all the counties of England; some counties had more than one, and Yorkshire and London were allocated four.<sup>4</sup> Virtually all those appointed were retired Army officers who found the modest pay - £150-200 per annum - a useful supplement to their incomes. For these men the work was respectable and congenial, and had the added advantage that most of it could be done from home. The drawback of appointing Army personnel as Col.

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1 n.d., Burst-Black Book 64.

2 Shee to Hilder, 20 Jan. 1910, Hil. Burst-Black Book 72.

3 Hilder to Earl of Warwick (copy), 4 Mar. 1909, Hil. Blue-Red Book 68.

4 Elliot to Milner, 13 Nov. 1909, Mil. 137.

Elliot, the honorary secretary to the League, remarked, when discussing the suitability of Col. Bird to succeed Shee as secretary in August 1910,<sup>1</sup> was that it promoted an excessively 'military' image of the League; but he could not see where else they could get 'a really good middle aged man' for £350 a year.<sup>2</sup>

The value of a good organizing secretary was emphasized by the moribund condition into which the Norfolk branch sank during 1909 after the organizing secretary had had to leave to rejoin his regiment in India.<sup>3</sup> The position was vacant for over a year until the appointment of Major Beck in 1910. He immediately set to work to revitalize the branch. A letter Beck wrote in July 1910 to Sir Gerard Noel, who was on the executive committee of the Norfolk branch as well as being a vice-president of the League itself, recounting his recent activities, provides a glimpse of the organizing secretary's tasks.<sup>4</sup> By personal canvassing he had enrolled 40 new members and 24 new adherents<sup>5</sup> including - and this was a real 'capture' - the leader of the Liberal party in Norwich; he had obtained a list of those who had failed to renew their memberships over the previous two years and was arranging to visit them personally; he had flooded selected parts of the county with League literature; and he had got out a circular for the ladies, whom he wanted as 'helpers'.

The appointment of organizing secretaries was accompanied by a policy of decentralization. With the sudden expansion of branches the League was becoming top-heavy and bureaucratic and was, in the view of some, stifling local initiative.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, it was decided to create 'a closely knit organisation by counties, in the

1 Shee went as secretary to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

2 Elliot to Milner, 20 Aug. 1910, Mil. 137.

3 See two letters from Col. Forbes Eden to Sir Gerard Noel, 6 Jan. 1909 and 29 July 1909, Noe. 14.

4 21 July 1910, Noe. 14.

5 'Adherents' were working-class supporters who paid 1d and received an 'Adherent's Card'.

6 Leo Maxse, for instance. See Shee to Maxse, 18 May 1910, Max. 461, R.638.

conviction that only by decentralised and localised effort could ... numbers and influence rapidly be increased'.<sup>1</sup> The counties each had their own executive committee through which the channel of representation passed from the sub-branches to the League's general council.<sup>2</sup> They were now permitted to retain 50% of their revenue to use as they saw fit.

Organizational expansion necessarily entailed increased expenditure which could not be met out of the ordinary revenue derived from membership subscriptions. The immediate problem in 1908-9 was partially overcome through a special fund which raised £950. The donors were Abe Bailey, Roberts, Newton, Sir Coleridge Grove, Col. Hon. M.G. Talbot, Col. Elliot, Arthur Grenfell, and Miss Warre.<sup>3</sup> The executive committee hoped that their example would be followed by others. However the money was never forthcoming in the sums required. The League was continually appealing for funds: in periods of confidence to press home the advantage; during sluggish times to recover impetus.

Considering the abundant wealth and elevated status of its membership it is surprising that the N.S.L. should have encountered such financial embarrassment that in 1911, for instance, some of the headquarters staff had to be dismissed.<sup>4</sup> A partial explanation, at least, is probably to be found in the Edwardian notion of social obligation. The fact that the names of prominent local landowners and dignitaries appeared on the membership rolls, often as presidents

1 Roberts in speech at A.G.M., 29 June 1910: Nation in Arms, V (Aug. 1910), p.355.

2 *ibid.*, p.3 8.

3 N.S.L. 'Report and Balance Sheet 1909'. Miss Warre was quite possibly a relation of Dr. Edmund Warre, headmaster of Eton 1884-1905, who favoured compulsory training.

4 Roberts to Earl Fitzwilliam (copy), 2 May 1911, Rob. 125/1/82.



and vice-presidents of branches, was no guarantee that they were active or enthusiastic supporters of national service. The League was a respectable body with worthy aims, and they were accustomed to patronizing deserving causes; it was part of their function. And once a few men of standing in a particular locality had been recruited, conformist pressures would lead others to follow suit. But having discharged their social obligation, they did not necessarily feel it incumbent upon themselves to put their time, and still less their money, at the disposal of the League. The Norfolk branch, for example, was ill-served by a president, Lord Leicester, who was so busy that he had 'no time to give active help' and a vice-president, Lord Albemarle, who was 'very lukewarm'.<sup>1</sup> The strength of their commitment can be gauged from the fact that when the League bill was put to the vote in the Lords on 13 July 1909 both voted against it!

Since the League's accounts have apparently not survived it is impossible to compile a comprehensive list of benefactors. However, some indication of the kind of person who was considered to be sympathetic enough and sufficiently rich to make a substantial contribution to the League's organization fund is contained in a list drawn up by Shee and Elliot at headquarters and forwarded to Lord Milner in November 1908.<sup>2</sup> The seventeen men singled out to assist the cause were: Sir Edward Stern, Lord Northcliffe, Sir Edward Tennant, Arthur Pearson, Lord Newton, the Duke of Portland, Lord Burnham, Everard Hambro, Pandelli Ralli, Lord Rothschild, John Murray, T.C. Horsfall, J. St. Loe Strachey, T. Dyer Edwards, Sir John Wolfe-Barry, Major

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1 Forbes Eden to Noel, 29 July 1909, Noe. 14.

2 The list initialled 'W.E[lliot]' was undated. Shee announced his intention of sending it to Milner in letter of 18 Nov. 1908, Mil. 137.

Hilder, and Sir Gilbert Parker. The last ten had a mark affixed to their names signifying, in Shee's view, that they 'might fairly, and with a probability of success, be asked for £500'. It is not known how many, if any, personal approaches were made by Milner, but the annual report for 1909 revealed that only £950 had been raised for the fund and only Newton from the above list was mentioned as a contributor.<sup>1</sup>

The two outstanding subscribers to the League's finances were Major Hilder and Walter Morrison. The latter, the heir to a business fortune and a former Liberal Unionist M.P., donated £1,000 in 1911<sup>2</sup> and £10,000 in 1913.<sup>3</sup> Characteristically, for he shunned publicity, he insisted that the cheque for £10,000 should be recorded anonymously. The full extent of his munificence, therefore, may never be known. However, the writer in the Dictionary of National Biography was probably not exaggerating when he described Morrison as 'the mainstay of Lord Roberts's campaign for national service'.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas Morrison attached no condition whatsoever - except that of anonymity - to his donations, Hilder tried to use his money to goad others into following his example. At the beginning of 1909 he promised the League £1,000 towards a campaign fund, provided that nine other sums of £1,000 were raised within three months of the date upon which the appeal was issued.<sup>5</sup> The strategem was ineffectual.<sup>6</sup>

1 See above, p.131.

2 Roberts' speech at A.G.M., 28 June 1911: Nation in Arms, VI (Aug. 1911), p.406.

3 Morrison to Elliot (copy), 8 July 1913, Mil. 137.

4 Article by G[eoffrey] D[awson], D.N.B. 1912-21, p.389.

5 'Extract from Minutes of the Committee Meeting held Wed. 17 February 1909. Lord Milner in the Chair', Hil. Burst-Black Book 62. See also Shee to Milner, 28 Jan. 1909 (incorrectly dated 1908), Mil. 137.

6 He repeated the ploy in December 1911 with an appeal for £10,000 to members of the Stock Exchange. £3,000 was subscribed promptly, but then the appeal ground to a halt and was abandoned. Hil. Burst-Black Book 67.

I appreciate immensely your generous offers [wrote Milner in October 1909] & I hope it may not be long before I can appeal to you with a good conscience & with some possibility of assuring you that others will do likewise. 1

Hilder was worth cultivating for, in spite of the failure of his plan, he donated two cheques for 1,000 guineas to the League in 1909 and 1910.<sup>2</sup>

What does emerge quite conclusively, therefore, from the scattered information available is that only a handful of its wealthy supporters were willing to dig deep into their pockets on behalf of the national service movement.

Notwithstanding its financial problems, the League was an extremely active propaganda organization. The main vehicle was the monthly National Service Journal, first published in November 1903. In March 1907 its title was changed to the Nation in Arms and it survived as a monthly until the end of 1911 after which, for reasons of economy, it was published quarterly.<sup>3</sup> This last change suggests that the decision taken eighteen months before to reduce the price from 3d to 1d and to make the magazine more widely available for public sale through the bookshops of W.H. Smith & Sons had not come off.<sup>4</sup> By the standards of the time the Journal was quite a lively periodical. Naturally it carried articles on events and developments which could be used to bolster the case for national service, but its very wide interpretation of that case enabled it to avoid a narrow concentration on political and strategic questions. In addition, following the popular press, it sponsored competitions for 'Fighting Phrases',

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1 20 Oct. 1909, Hil. Burst-Black Book 62.

2 See letters of thanks from Milner, Shee and Roberts in April 1910, Hil. Blue-Red Book 67.

3 Mr. Rickards K.C. who moved the resolution for quarterly publication at the general council meeting on 25 Oct. 1911 estimated it would save about £1,900 a year: Nation in Arms, VI (Nov. 1911), p.577.

4 Nation in Arms, V (May, 1910), p.201.

'Practical Suggestions', the words for a new League song, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the journal the League expounded its case in a series of penny pamphlets and leaflets. Some pamphlets were written specifically to explain League policies and principles;<sup>2</sup> others simply involved the republication of speeches or material which had appeared elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> More substantial works published on behalf of the League included Shee's seminal A Briton's First Duty; A Nation in Arms (1907), a selection of Lord Roberts' speeches; A Territorial Army in Being (1908);<sup>4</sup> and Fallacies and Facts (1911),<sup>5</sup> a reply to Ian Hamilton's Compulsory Service. The last three were published by John Murray.

Nor was the spoken word neglected. In the first half of 1910 the League was averaging 200 meetings a month.<sup>7</sup> A list of 53 forthcoming meetings for February 1910 from the Nation in Arms<sup>8</sup> illustrates the diversity: locations included Glasgow Y.M.C.A. and Redditch Temperance Hall, Garnstone Castle in Herefordshire and a Unitarian Church in Lewisham; the size ranged from a drawing room meeting in Beccles to a mass meeting at Queen's Hall; the form varied from a smoking concert in Haywards Heath to a lantern lecture in Buckinghamshire, from a debate in Melrose to an A.G.M. in Edinburgh; and the audiences were composed of Social Democrats in Willesden, undergraduates

1 For the first two see N.S.J., I (Nov. 1906), p.86; for the last, Nation in Arms, II (Sept. 1907), p.217.

2 For example, Leveson Scarth, National Ideals (N.S.L., 1910).

3 Thus, Frederick Jackson, Home Defence (N.S.L., 1909) was largely a selection of extracts from Roberts' speeches and a reprint of a letter to the Times from Frederic Harrison of 18 March 1909.

4 See above, chapt. III, p.105.

5 See below, chapt. V, pp.179 ff.

6 Murray was a League supporter. Interestingly he also published Compulsory Service.

7 Shee to Maxse, 18 May 1910, Max. 461, R.638.

8 V, p.70.

in Bristol, working men in Putney and Congregationalists in Anerley. In this sample about half the speakers, a misleadingly high proportion (the journal was naturally better informed about their forward engagements) were League officials, either from headquarters like Shee, or organizing secretaries like Major Curtis whose area was Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire; the rest were dedicated members, some of whom like Admiral Sir N. Bowden-Smith and Dr. T. Miller Maguire had been appearing on League platforms for many years.

Within the limits imposed by convention women also played their part in the N.S.L. and at the national level possessed their own executive and general committees. 'Are you a Woman?' inquired the Journal, 'Then join the LEAGUE, which will make the men of England better sons, better husbands, better brothers, better fathers, by having given some small part of their manhood to the service of their country.'<sup>1</sup> The response - not specifically to this kind of emotional appeal, for women seem to have joined for much the same reasons as their menfolk - was considerable, notably amongst those who were obliged to pass their time in refined idleness. Their functions were essentially hospitable, secretarial, and decorative. They could not, of course, address public meetings, but they could perform a recitation or a song.<sup>2</sup> They could not be lady chairmen or vice-chairmen of branches, but they were permitted to take on the duties of honorary secretaries.<sup>3</sup> They could not be expected to serve their

1 'An Appeal To One And All', I (Sept. 1904).

2 At a meeting in Warrington, 'Mrs. Edelsten recited "The Islanders" amidst much applause', N.S.J., I (Dec. 1904), p.265. At the League's annual dinner in 1908 'Miss Florence Shee ... sang "Land of Hope and Glory", the whole audience joining in the refrain.' Nation in Arms, III (July, 1908), p.164.

3 Twenty-five of the honorary or joint honorary secretaries of the fifty-two sub-branches in Essex in 1912 were women: The Patriot, IV (July, 1912), pp.8-13.

country in arms, but they could be encouraged to qualify in first aid by joining St. John Ambulance classes.<sup>1</sup> They could, too, throw open their drawing rooms for meetings, preside at fund-raising garden parties, and write short plays embodying the national service message.

The last-named activity points to an essential truth about League propaganda. The annual report for 1909 recommended two short plays, by Miss Crosfield and Miss Jennings, which could be performed at meetings to stimulate thought and discussion. At the same time, Guy du Maurier's play An Englishman's Home, melodramatically exposing national unpreparedness, was the sensation of the London stage. Du Maurier presented no cut-and-dried solution, but by focusing on the problem he promoted the cause of the N.S.L. (and for that matter the Territorial Army)<sup>2</sup> immeasurably more than Misses Crosfield and Jennings. In short, it was extraneous circumstances and factors, not League propaganda, however spirited and ingenious, which was fundamentally responsible for the upsurge in membership in 1909-10. This is not to denigrate the impact of those who toiled on the League's behalf, but to put it in perspective.

The League provided a rallying point for those who felt uneasy about national defence - or indeed any aspect of what they considered to be the national malaise. Assuredly there was much to induce disquiet in 1909. The most important source of public anxiety was the naval 'scare':<sup>3</sup> the fear of an accelerated German shipbuilding programme, the revelations of a schism in the Cabinet, the agitation for

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1 Nation in Arms, IV (Mar. 1909), p.84.

2 Lord Esher made some remarks about the play in an interview with the Daily Mail and the next day received a cheque for £10,000 from Harold Harmsworth: Esher Journal, 12 Feb. 1909, Esh. 2/12, and Harmsworth to Esher, 5 Feb., Esh. 12/9, f.1.

3 For an account of the 'scare' see Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I, chapt. VII, pp.151-85.

eight Dreadnoughts, the hysteria stirred up by the press - all had the effect of casting doubt on the Royal Navy's margin of superiority over its rivals (or rival, for significantly the debate was, for most of the time, conducted by reference simply to the German Navy)<sup>1</sup> and extending to the public at large the qualms which had hitherto been restricted to governmental and service circles. This was a situation from which the N.S.L. could hardly fail to profit.

More positive encouragement was afforded by the renewed manifestations of imperial solidarity which accompanied the crisis. Both New Zealand and Australia offered to bear the cost of the construction of one Dreadnought;<sup>2</sup> and an Imperial Defence Conference held in London in July reached agreement on the creation of an Imperial General Staff and on the standardization of the organization and training of the military forces of the Empire.<sup>3</sup> However, what was even more heartening for the N.S.L. was the progress made in Australasia towards systems of universal training. The League had strong links with the Australian National Defence League, which had been founded in September 1905, and with the New Zealand movement through a branch of the N.S.L. established there in August 1906.<sup>4</sup> Before the end of 1909 acts for universal military training had been passed in both Australia and New Zealand. Both involved a cadet system for those aged 12-18 and a limited number of compulsory days training afterwards.<sup>5</sup> The schemes,

1 until the summer when the news of 'Austrian and Italian plans [to build dreadnoughts] had a decisive effect upon British naval policy', *ibid.*, p.171.

2 *ibid.*, p.179.

3 Dunlop, p.298.

4 N.S.J., I (Nov. 1906), p.89.

5 The Australian act, passed in Oct. 1909, laid down 16 whole-day drills or their equivalent for the Citizen Force, aged 18-20: Nation in Arms, V (Feb. 1910), p.62. The New Zealand act, Dec. 1909, demanded 14 days camp and 12 half days each year from 18 to 21: *ibid.*, (Mar. 1910), p.107.

which had been under consideration for some years,<sup>1</sup> were prompted as much by fear of Japan as by feelings of loyalty towards the mother country.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the period of training was, in the League's view, 'far too short'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the admission of the principle of compulsion and its application to white citizens of the Empire gave a terrific fillip to the movement in Britain.<sup>4</sup>

From the first the League had realized the importance of the press in carrying its arguments to a much wider public than could be hoped for from its own journal with its restricted readership composed, in any case, mostly of the converted. In the early years the N.S.L. experienced some difficulty in getting its letters printed,<sup>5</sup> but in September 1905 the Journal was able to report that 'hardly any paper now will refuse to publish our opinions'.<sup>6</sup> To take advantage of this situation it appealed for volunteers to receive one or two press cuttings a week upon which they could base a letter or article incorporating League views. Letters to the press were thereafter a staple of N.S.L. propaganda. An interesting example of how the facility was sometimes exploited occurred in 1911. On 16 December Lord Haldane made a speech in Bradford in which he referred disparagingly to the views of soldiers, and of Lord Roberts in particular, on naval questions. Roberts was naturally anxious that Haldane

1 See, for example, 'Memorandum on the Proposed Organization of a National Guard for the Land Defence of Australia', 31 Jan. 1908, signed S.A. Pethebridge, acting sec., Dept. of Defence, Melbourne, Cab. 11/24.

2 Gordon, The Dominion Partnership in Imperial Defense, p.269.

3 Nation in Arms, V (Feb. 1910), p.63.

4 There was a marked increase in the number of articles on and references to Australasia in the Nation in Arms from 1909 onwards.

5 N.S.J., II (Jan. 1905), pp.274-5.

6 p.425.



should be answered - but by a sailor. Col. Elliot, therefore, passed on Roberts' request to Sir Gerard Noel, enclosing a cutting of the report of the speech from the Morning Post with the offending passages underlined in red.<sup>1</sup> Elliot inquired whether a draft letter should be prepared at headquarters and sent on for his signature or whether Noel would write a reply himself. In the latter case, he asked that the letter should be sent to the office so that it could be distributed to the press generally - a polite pretext for vetting the reply. Noel decided to write the letter himself. It met with approval save for one small and, under the circumstances, ironic emendation suggested by Roberts: the substitution of 'I would like to say' for 'I have been asked to say'.<sup>2</sup> The letter, which Noel had neither originated nor need even have written, was duly released and published above his name in the Morning Post on 29 December.

On the whole the press was sympathetic to the national service movement though, disconcertingly, it tended to divide along party lines. The Morning Post, owned by Countess Bathurst from 1908, was a steadfast champion.<sup>3</sup> The Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, and Standard were also accommodating. Neither Lord Northcliffe nor the Daily Mail which he controlled was a forthright proponent of national service at this time. Even so the sensationalism and Germanophobia of that paper served the interests of the N.S.L. far better than the coolly reasoned discussions of compulsion which appeared elsewhere: no newspaper articles did more to advance the cause than the series

1 18 Dec. 1911, Noe. 14.

2 Roberts to Noel, telegram, Dec. 1911 (day indecipherable), Noe. 14. The first sentence thus read: 'As one of Lord Roberts's Vice-Presidents of the National Service League and, in a sense, representing the Navy in that League, I would like to say a word on Lord Haldane's speech at Bradford on the 16th inst.'

3 Lady Bathurst was a member and benefactress of the League: see Roberts' acknowledgement of her donation of £100 at 1911 A.G.M., Nation in Arms, VI (Aug. 1911), p.405. It was she and the editor, Fabian Ware, who put 'very great pressure' on Spenser Wilkinson, then employed by the Morning Post, to write Britain at Bay: Wilkinson to Roberts, 25 Oct. 1909, Rob. 87/68.

on 'England and Germany' written by Robert Blatchford for the Mail in December 1909.<sup>1</sup> The Times was, as usual, a law unto itself. Although willing to publicize the activities and opinions of the League, its editorial policy under G.E. Buckle was firmly opposed to national service.<sup>2</sup> The appointment of Geoffrey Robinson, a former member of Milner's 'kindergarten', to succeed Buckle in 1912 brought a change of policy and an attempt to find a solution to the problem acceptable to both the main parties.<sup>3</sup> Among the weekly publications, the League could count on the firm support of the Observer under J.L. Garvin and the well-intentioned, if muddled, assistance of J. St. Loë Strachey and the Spectator; whilst among the monthly journals, there were the vehement out-pourings of Leo Maxse's National Review and the more studied, but scarcely less committed, advocacy of James Knowles' Nineteenth Century and After.<sup>4</sup>

The press support received by the N.S.L. was consistent with the predominantly upper middle-class and Unionist stamp of its membership. 'I am glad to say we have a good many supporters among the educated, but it is so difficult to get at the lower-middle, & the labouring classes', the secretary of the Midhurst branch reported.<sup>5</sup> It was a familiar complaint. Over the years numerous measures were devised to attract the working classes: a 'Working Man's Page' was included in

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1 13-23 Dec. They were the more welcome because Blatchford, editor of the Clarion, was a socialist.

2 The History of the Times. The Twentieth Century Test 1884-1912. (London, 1947), p.706.

3 See Esher (copy), 'Notes of a Conversation. 14 Feb. 1913', Asq. 24, f.116.

4 Garvin had previously edited the Outlook whose proprietor, C.S. Goldman, was a member of the executive committee of the N.S.L. According to A.M. Gollin, The Observer and J.L. Garvin 1908-1914 (London, 1960), p.15, at Goldman's request Garvin helped to write many of Lord Roberts' speeches. Both Strachey and Maxse were League members; and the Nineteenth Century has been described by Williamson (p.304) as the 'virtual house organ of the movement'.

5 Eva M. Richards to Milner, 29 Oct. 1910, Mil. 194.

the journal from October 1906;<sup>1</sup> lunch-time factory meetings were arranged;<sup>2</sup> and in 1912 about sixty wage-earners were invited to a general council meeting to discuss how to get the message across to their colleagues.<sup>3</sup> They proved, however, highly resistant to all attempts to win them round. The attitudes of ordinary working men are notoriously difficult to analyse and explain for as C.F.G. Masterman observed: 'They produce no authors. They edit no newspapers. They find no vocal expression for their sentiments and desires.'<sup>4</sup> Moreover the common practice of equating 'the working class' with 'the Labour Movement' has recently, and justifiably, been called into question.<sup>5</sup> The traditional prejudice against the Army certainly played its part, for working-class antipathy, no more than middle and upper-class support, had a wholly rational basis. But a more potent cause of mistrust and suspicion was probably the League's 'Establishment' image.<sup>6</sup> Surely no movement dominated by landowners,

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1 N.S.J., I (Oct. 1906), p.66.

2 Nation in Arms, V (Jan. 1910), p.41.

3 ibid., VII (Midsummer, 1912), p.93.

4 The Condition of England, first published 1909, J.T. Boulton, ed. (London, 1960), p.14.

5 Richard Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class. Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902 (London, 1972).

6 A check on the chairmen, vice-chairmen, and hon. secretaries of the Essex branch in 1912 from The Essex 'WhoandWhere' (Colchester, 1909), Essex in the Twentieth Century (Brighton and London, 1909), Who's Who in Essex (Worcester, 1935), and Kelly's Directory of Essex 1912 (London, 1912), identified 117 of the 152 names. Of these 6 can be classified as nobility; 24 were or had been Army officers; 28 were J.P.s; 7 were doctors of medicine; 10 were Anglican clergymen or their immediate family; 31 were 'private residents'; 2 were farmers; and there was a single draper, hotelier, civil engineer, estate agent, elementary schoolmaster, sergeant-major, barrister, printer, and bank manager. (Obviously the categories overlap and in order to avoid duplication individuals have been counted in only one group. Ladies were assigned to the category in which their husbands or fathers would have been placed.)

magistrates, Army officers, clergymen, and the like could genuinely have the interests of the working classes at heart?<sup>1</sup> Hence there was a fear, which nothing the League said or did could allay, that national service was a screen for sinister and unspecified purposes.

Ultimately the League could only succeed if it secured wide, popular support. As long as it failed to tap the more obstinate sections of the population expansion of numbers counted for little except to accentuate the existing social and political one-sidedness of the movement. The League had always claimed to be a strict non-party organization; its political independence was inserted into the 'Memorandum and Articles of Association' drawn up in 1906 when the N.S.L. was incorporated under the Companies acts.<sup>2</sup> The non-partisan stance would have carried more conviction if the League's complexion, both inside and outside Parliament, had been less conspicuously Unionist.

In July 1908, the maverick Liberal M.P. for Stratford-on-Avon, Capt. Kincaid-Smith, presented a bill in the Commons for national military training.<sup>3</sup> It was rejected 250-34. Of those who voted for the bill 31 were Unionists and 3 were Liberals. Wisely the N.S.L. had abstained from supporting Kincaid-Smith, ostensibly because the proposals were 'at variance' with its own,<sup>4</sup> though a stronger reason

1 The suspicion of the movement derived from the character of its support and the prejudice against the Army comes across very forcibly in one of the few books of the time which can lay some claim to expressing authentic working-class opinions, Stephen Reynolds and Bob and Tom Woolley, Seems So! A Working-Class View of Politics (London, 1913), chapt.9, pp.76-84.

2 11 Aug. 1906, p.2, Mil. 137.

3 7 July 1908, Hansard, 4th ser., CXCI. 1481-4.

4 Nation in Arms, III (June, 1908), p.141. Kincaid-Smith proposed beginning training at 18 (48 days first year, 30 days second, and 14 days every alternate year until the age of 30). The League would have begun a year later and ended the liability at 22.

was probably that it did not wish to be associated with the only too predictable and pathetic failure of the bill.

The League was fully aware of how precipitate Kincaid-Smith's measure had been. Few Members of the House of Commons in 1908, with its massive Liberal majority, were prepared to stand up and be counted in favour of compulsion; and those who were, like Rowland Hunt, were often considered to be rather eccentric. Undoubtedly there were others who were sympathetic but were constrained by political discretion and marginal seats. The N.S.L. saw its first task, therefore, as to create the climate in which its aims would no longer be regarded as abnormal and politically detrimental. The latent compulsionists could then declare themselves, and others, impressed by their example and now able themselves to examine the case objectively, would follow. To some extent the primary objective was to be achieved: the Commons elected in January 1910 contained, according to the League journal, 155 M.P.s who supported national service compared with 43 in the previous house.<sup>1</sup> With roughly a quarter of all M.P.s in favour, national service had clearly progressed beyond the stage of tainted insignificance. Yet the upsurge in parliamentary support was not to be the expected prelude to success.

The League had miscalculated in two important respects. First, it had not foreseen that the growth of parliamentary support would be matched, and even exceeded, by the emergence of parliamentary opposition which had also lain dormant, not for reasons of expediency, but because hitherto national service had been politically inconceivable. And secondly, it reckoned without the intransigence of the Liberal party. Of the 105 League supporters in the new House of Commons who

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1 *ibid.*, V (Mar. 1910), p.102.

gave permission for their names to be published in the League journal in March 1910 only 3 were Liberals.<sup>1</sup> At no time before 1914 did the League secure any significant number of defections from the Liberal party. It was, of course, easier to take up controversial causes in opposition and the overriding need to sustain the Liberal Government in the hectic and strained circumstances of the period 1910-14 certainly curbed the activities of party malcontents. However, the near-unity of the party on the question of national service was not only the product of tactical necessity; it rested also on traditional Liberal principles, particularly those relating to governmental economy and individual freedom, both of which seemed threatened by compulsory service. Above all perhaps, the resolve of the party was stiffened by the nonconformist element which seems to have been quite impervious to the League's arguments. Whereas Anglicans, including a fair sprinkling of bishops<sup>2</sup> (and to a lesser extent Roman Catholics) were prominent in all aspects of the movement, the League was compelled to admit in 1909 that 'an equal insight into the moral significance of our proposals has not hitherto been displayed by other religious denominations'.<sup>3</sup> Lord Milner, in October 1913, couldn't think of a single notable Liberal nonconformist who had ever 'taken up the cudgels for national service'.<sup>4</sup>

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1 There may have been proportionately more Liberals among the 50 M.P.s who were unwilling to have their names published - the League claimed the support of 155 overall - since the pressures on them to conceal the information would have been greater. Even so, the number was very small.

2 The N.S.L. annual report for 1909 showed at least 9 Anglican bishops in the League.

3 Nation in Arms, IV (Aug. 1909), p.307.

4 Milner to Roberts, 5 Oct., Rob. 45/125.

Why then, faced with such manifest hostility, did the League not abandon its political neutrality and align itself with the Unionist party to which most of its supporters owed allegiance? The official explanation was that the great questions of national defence should be removed from the arena of party politics. The real reason was that national service was so widely regarded as a political millstone that neither party would risk adopting it and in effect hand over power to its opponents; thus it could only be carried by inter-party agreement. Accordingly, on the one occasion when the League did depart from its declared policy and make a series of approaches to the Unionist party, it received scant encouragement and rapidly reverted to its bipartisan orientation.<sup>1</sup>

The premise that the electorate was strongly against national service was probably well founded. The fact remains, however, that it could not be tested. The British constitution made no provision for concentration on a single issue. In general elections and by-elections a candidate could, of course, choose to give prominence to the question of compulsion; but even then it could only be one issue among many and there was no guarantee that his opponents would respond.

At the beginning of April 1909, Capt. Kincaid-Smith resigned in order to fight a by-election on the simple issue of national military training. At first sight this appears to be an opportunity to test the validity of the assumptions which were made about the electoral unpopularity of national service. A closer examination of the relevant circumstances reveals how untrustworthy a guide a by-election could be. Kincaid-Smith was one of the motley band of Liberals who had stood for election in 1906, with no apparent hope of success, and had been returned in the Liberal landslide. S.W. Warwickshire had previously been a safe Unionist seat - it had returned a Unionist in 1892, 1895, 1900, and 1901 - and was confidently expected to revert to

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp.148 ff.

its former loyalty at the next election. So Kincaid-Smith's days as an M.P. were probably numbered. Not only that, but the local Liberal association, with which he had been at odds for some time, had decided not to readopt him,<sup>1</sup> especially since in March he had supported a vote of censure on the Government.<sup>2</sup> He had, therefore, to stand in the by-election as an independent. The official Liberal candidate, the Hon. Joseph Martin, had, apparently, 'a strong objection to personal canvassing on the part of a candidate for Parliament' and gave the impression that the object of his candidature was 'not so much to hold the seat for the Liberals as to make certain of the defeat and removal from the scene of Captain Kincaid-Smith'.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, when polling day came on 4 May, the Unionist, P.S. Foster, romped home.<sup>4</sup> His victory owed little to the views he held on national service. Indeed he played down the issue and it figured only slightly in the campaigns of the two major candidates. The Times summed it up:

Universal military training was not the pivot upon which the election turned, nor is it possible to deduce from the figures any conclusion whatever concerning the opinion of the constituency upon that great national question. 5

Besides destroying the precarious hold which the Liberal party had on S.W. Warwickshire, Kincaid-Smith's resignation caused friction in the National Service League, which was divided over whether he should be given official support. On 17 April, Lord Newton was confident it would.<sup>6</sup> But the next day, Rowland Hunt, who had gone

1 Times, 6 Apr. 1909, p.12.

2 On naval policy, 29 Mar. 1909, Hansard, 5th ser., III. 145.

3 Times, 26 Apr. 1909, p.10.

4 The figures, in an 81% poll, were: Foster, 5374; Martin, 2747; Kincaid-Smith, 479, *ibid.*, 6 May 1909, p.9.

5 *ibid.*, p.11.

6 Newton to Maxse, Max. 459, R.108.



down to Stratford to speak for Kincaid-Smith, reported that the N.S.L. was 'funking' the issue 'because a few people have threatened to resign'.<sup>1</sup> Hunt underestimated the seriousness of the dispute. Lord Milner, who would personally have chosen to assist Kincaid-Smith, admitted in a statement in the Times on 26 April that there was a 'great division of opinion' among members of the League, which thus had no option but to remain neutral.<sup>2</sup> Two days before, George Shee had tendered a rather different explanation, to the same paper, for the League's inactivity.<sup>3</sup> He revealed that in October 1908, Kincaid-Smith, who was then a member of the League's executive committee, had proposed that the N.S.L. should officially support any parliamentary candidate who made compulsory military training 'the foremost plank in his platform', irrespective of what his views were on other political questions. The proposal was rejected; and the committee could now 'see no reason to depart from the decision thus arrived at in Capt in Kincaid-Smith's own case'. The League, he added, was composed 'of men of every school of political thought' and it was impossible to limit elections to one issue only.

Shee's explanation was legalistic and hollow. The by-election at Stratford had brought to the fore the whole question of the relationship between the League and the major political parties and had seen the beginnings of a deliberate attempt to get the Unionist party to commit itself to national service. Although the approaches and soundings were unofficial, it is clear that had they been received less warily, the League would readily have become the branch of the Unionist party which some of its critics always alleged it was. To some extent the Stratford election was a dress rehearsal for the more testing occasion later in the year when the national service bill was to be put to the Lords. Thus for much of 1909, whilst on the one hand the League was proclaiming its political neutrality, on the other it was intriguing to align itself with the Tories.

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1 Hunt to Maxse, 18 Apr. 1909, Max. 459, R.112.

2 p.10.

3 p.10.

On the day that Kincaid-Smith's resignation was announced, Lord Milner wrote to Balfour and appealed to the Unionist leader not to put up a candidate against Kincaid-Smith at the coming by-election.<sup>1</sup> Milner's reasoning was obscure, especially for one usually so adept at cutting through to the pith of an argument. He declared that if Kincaid-Smith were defeated by Unionist votes it would produce 'a very bad effect'; would create 'an almost impossible situation'; would put himself and many other of Balfour's supporters in 'a very tight place'. He did not specify what action these disgruntled Tory unionists would take; in truth, short of defecting to the Liberal party where their views would be even less welcome, there was essentially nothing they could do. Another League stalwart, Lord Newton, was 'disgusted' at the stand taken by the Unionist party.<sup>2</sup>

We ought, in my opinion, to have announced that we would support Kincaid Smith on this occasion, leaving it open as to what course we should take at the general election. What is the use of saying that National Defence is not a party question and then running a creature who won't have anything to say to Universal Service?

Balfour, however, was not prepared to allow the election to become a simple test case for national service. As party leader he wanted it fought over the whole range of issues, as he made clear in his conventional letter of good wishes to the Unionist candidate.<sup>3</sup> The absurdity of doing otherwise - not that his acute mind really needed the elucidation - was pointed out by Sandars:

... we are to call upon the party in Warwickshire to vote for a man who is against ~~us~~ on all the main principles of our case because he is standing in favour of Universal Training - a question which is not included in our official programme. <sup>4</sup>

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1 6 Apr. 1909, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49697, fs.146-52.

2 Newton to Maxse, 17 Apr. 1909, Max. 459, R.108.

3 Printed in the Times, 30 Apr. 1909, p.12.

4 12 Apr. 1909, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49765, fs.217-8.

Whilst Milner and Newton were concerned with the immediate problem of the by-election, others were looking further ahead. On 7 April Lord Roberts addressed an appeal to Balfour. He confessed that he had lost faith in the non-partisan approach to national defence and had reached the conclusion, regretfully, that the matter would have to be settled along party lines. After Easter he intended to present a bill for universal military training. The movement was growing fast.

All that is needed is a leader. Will you be that leader? Even such important subjects as the closer union of the Empire, Tariff Reform, and Education sink into insignificance when compared with that of home defence. <sup>1</sup>

Again Balfour refused to take the bait. The electoral pendulum was swinging back towards his party and a general election was within sight; the last thing he wanted to do was to throw away this advantage by saddling the party with national service. He was personally, in any case, far from convinced that compulsion was the solution to the problems of home defence.

The League did not give up hope, though St. Loe Strachey expressed the view to Milner that if the Unionist party couldn't be persuaded to take national service before the next election, 'we might just as well throw up the sponge in regard to that policy'.<sup>2</sup> He doubted whether Unionists would vote Liberal just because the party had adopted national service. Milner agreed that national service would not seriously impair the Unionist chances of winning the next election. But he did not think the League was yet strong enough 'to force a party leader to adopt our programme by any direct pressure'.<sup>3</sup> The kind of indirect pressure which, he believed, could be brought to

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 49725, fs.289-90.

<sup>2</sup> (copy), 3 May 1909, Str. S/10/11/2.

<sup>3</sup> 8 May 1909, Str. S/10/12/2.

bear on the Unionist party was revealed in a further letter.<sup>1</sup> It was not up to the League as a body, he contended, but to individual members of the League within the Unionist party to 'force the pace' and to try to get the party to commit itself to national service.

The first big opportunity that I see is on Roberts' Bill. He means to go to a division, whatever the party leaders do, & Newton, I, & I hope a good many others will go with him. I am quite hopeful that we may take a sufficient number of leading Unionist Peers (Curzon certainly & I trust Cromer) with us to make the Party Leaders realise that this is no longer an academic question & that there is a body of conviction wh. has got to be reckoned with.

In part then, since there was no possibility of it becoming law even if it passed in the Lords, the League bill was a propaganda exercise on carefully chosen ground which might, if successful, coax or embarrass the Unionist leadership into revising its attitude to national service.

In drawing up the 'National Service (Training and Home Defence) Bill',<sup>2</sup> the League had taken the advice of Capt. Crosfield and utilized the framework of the Haldane scheme,<sup>3</sup> extending to all British males aged 18-30 the liability to serve in the Territorial Force for the purposes of home defence. Recruit training was to be a continuous period of 4 months for infantry and 4-6 months for other branches, followed by 15 days annual training in each of the next 3 years. Exemptions were to be permitted in the case of those serving in the Navy or Naval Reserve, members of the Regular or Reserve Forces, only sons of widows, ministers of religion, and the physically and mentally infirm. Criminals, habitual drunkards and others of bad character were to be disqualified and required to pay 1% of their income if it

1 17 May 1909, Str. S/10/11/2.

2 The text of the bill was printed as Appendix I to Ian Hamilton's Compulsory Service, 2nd edition (London, 1911), pp.151-9.

3 See above, chapt. III, p.109.

exceeded £52 per annum. The measure was, of necessity, a compromise: internally the League had as usual to cater for a range of views which extended from support for boy training to outright conscriptionist convictions; externally it had to strike a balance between public acceptability and strategic credibility.

The League was always an uneasy coalition. Now and again attempts were made to patch up the differences and present a united front to the outside world; but since the ulterior motive was, very naturally, to increase public support, accord was invariably sought in the direction of moderation and at the expense of the hardliners, who were by definition the most tenacious in their opinions. In December 1905 and January 1906, for example, soon after Roberts became president, a series of meetings was held with prominent members and supporters of the Auxiliary Forces including Lord Lovat, Robert Johnson, Repington, St. Loe Strachey, and H.A. Gwynne, with a view to formulating a new programme based on their common interests.<sup>1</sup> Before the crucial meeting, which was to be on 3 January at Brooks's, Milner believed that the basis for a practical programme had already been established and all that was left to do was to work out the details.<sup>2</sup> Essentially what was envisaged was that the N.S.L. should abandon compulsion for adults and direct its efforts towards boy training and increasing the efficiency of the Auxiliary Forces. That such a renunciation was seriously contemplated is perhaps explained by the uncertainty and pessimism brought about by the recent change of government. Milner foresaw that the great difficulty would be with 'the out & out compulsory service people, who form the nucleus of the N.S.L.';<sup>3</sup> and so it proved. The new manifesto of the League, issued in the following month, whilst stressing the importance of military instruction for boys

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1 See Lovat to Strachey, 22 Dec. 1905, Str. S/24/1/4, and Milner to Roberts, 27 Dec. 1905, Rob. 45/61.

2 Milner to Roberts, 28 Dec. 1905, Rob. 45/62.

3 *ibid.*

and the adoption of measures to improve the Auxiliary Forces, retained the provision for 3-4 months' training 'at the military age'.<sup>1</sup>

On 16 February, Roberts sent Strachey a copy of the revised programme.<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing in it, I think, that can possibly prevent Volunteers from joining the League, and I hope you will be able to give the League a helping hand in tomorrow's Spectator.

The note of apprehension was justified. Strachey replied that he was afraid Roberts would not like his Spectator article,

for I have felt obliged to say what I feel and what I said at our meeting, as to the unwisdom of insisting ... on the compulsory training and the general throwing over of the voluntary basis. ... To speak frankly, the Manifesto was a great disappointment and surprise to me, as I had hoped from the tone of the discussion at the meeting, that it would have been very different in character. <sup>3</sup>

The intensity of the feeling between the two wings of the movement at this time is illustrated by Lord Newton's public assessment of Strachey in May 1906 as

more dangerous and more pernicious than any else body [sic] living in this country, ... who is responsible for the preposterous and absurd doctrine that all we require in this country is a large number of persons with broad-brimmed hats, with rifles hanging up on pegs, which rifles they are going to take down at the necessary moment and shoot the invaders, and then return to their ordinary vocations. <sup>4</sup>

The diversity of opinion within the movement was naturally a great source of weakness, and one which opponents were quick to seize upon. In the same debate in the Lords in which Newton had castigated

1 Letter from Roberts to the Times, 17 Feb. 1906, p.12.

2 Str. S/12/3/31.

3 (copy), 16 Feb. 1906, *ibid*.

4 Lords debate on Home Defence, 14 May 1906, Hansard, 4th ser., CLVII.118.

Strachey, the Earl of Donoughmore, for the Government, commented upon the various 'schools of thought in connection with the idea of compulsory service' and the fact that that very afternoon there had been speeches from three of these different factions - Wemyss, militia ballot; Dundonald, youth training; and Newton. He suggested, therefore that

we should none of us be called upon to regard the question of compulsory service too seriously until there is at any rate some sort of agreement amongst the various Members of your Lordships' House and those interested in the question outside upon the main tenets of the policy. <sup>1</sup>

In 1909 the N.S.L. was as united as it was ever likely to be on the bill which Roberts was to present, though a large section of the membership regarded the measure as a first step rather than a final solution.

In the period preceding the second reading of the bill a dispute developed between the League and the Government over the cost of the proposed scheme. The League's 'Estimate of the Numbers and the Cost involved under the Scheme of Training proposed by the National Service League' had been published on 1 February 1909.<sup>2</sup> Taking 416,000 as the number of males reaching the age of eighteen each year and deducting medical rejections and legal exemptions (200,000), recruits for the Navy, Marines and Regular Army (43,000), emigrants (10,000), and those in the mercantile marine (15,000), the League was left with an annual contingent of 148,000. In addition, once the scheme had been in operation for 4 years, there would be roughly 400,000 men (allowing for 5% annual wastage) undertaking the 15 days annual training demanded in the second, third and fourth years. The cost was calculated on two separate bases:

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1 *ibid.*, 122.

2 *Mil.* 137.

- (A) On a proportional cost of the Regular Soldier as given in the Army Estimates (1908-9), with certain modifications.
- (B) On MR. HALDANE'S figures as to the cost of the Special Reserve.

Under (A) the net additional cost was estimated at £3,859,199; under (B) at £3,803,372. Roberts confided to J.L. Garvin that these figures were over-estimates rather than under-estimates.<sup>1</sup>

In any event these sums were a far cry from the calculation on £20 million put about by Government spokesmen in the previous November;<sup>2</sup> and as the debate approached they forced the Government to produce a counter-estimate of £7,820,000, based this time on the published proposals of the League.<sup>3</sup> The N.S.L. replied with a detailed criticism of this paper which appeared in the press in 12 July, the day of the Lords debate.<sup>4</sup> The true figure, as Milner admitted, probably lay somewhere between the two estimates.<sup>5</sup> What was important for the League was that the sums had been brought down to a realistic level, and the financial imposition of national service, though still substantial, was correspondingly less of a bugbear.

Yet the objection to national service on the grounds that the country simply could not afford it remained a formidable one - all the more so because it rested on plausible foundations. Financial

1 (copy), 14 Feb. 1909, Rob. 122/11/42.

2 Lord Crewe, for instance, in the Lords, 23 Nov. 1908, Hansard, 4th ser., CXCVI. 1721.

3 'Memorandum on the published Estimate of the Cost of the Scheme of Training proposed by the National Service League', 7 July 1909, [Cd. 101], BPP (1909), XI (Lords).

4 'Memorandum on the War Office Paper issued in criticism of the Published Estimate of the National Service League', 10 July 1909, Mil. 137. A summary of this document appeared in the Times, 12 July, p.12.

5 Milner to Roberts, 9 July 1909, Rob. 45/109.



ruin would ensue, it was said, if, alongside a supreme navy, the nation attempted to build up a mass army. The comparison between the services was instructive. The tremendous increase in naval expenditure during this period indicates that, after the obligatory commotion and protests, Parliament was prepared to pay for defence.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Navy the sacrifice was financial; that was acceptable and had the incidental advantage of keeping dockyard and armament workers in employment. National service was different: the sacrifice was primarily personal. Thus the argument that the country could not meet the cost of compulsion was specious. The British have customarily preferred to expend their treasure rather than shed their blood (or even sweat) in the defence of their interests; the fallacy has been in regarding the courses as alternatives. In the long run, it is arguable, that the nation which could not afford compulsion had to pay heavily,<sup>2</sup> and not only in monetary terms, for the cherished exemption.

The prospect of a favourable vote in the Lords had receded before the debate began. Lobbying had failed to persuade the Unionist party to support the measure. Leo Maxse believed that Kincaid-Smith, 'in spite of the excellence of his intentions', had harmed the cause.<sup>3</sup> 'Had he gone to the Unionist Whips before resigning his seat he could have made his own terms, as they are so keen on getting bye-elections.' Maxse was wrong on this latter point. Balfour had been consistent in his refusal to entertain compulsory service. Likewise, Lansdowne, the Unionist leader in the Lords, though more sympathetic, was

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1 The Navy estimates were £35,142,700 for 1909-10; they were £51,550,000 for 1914-15: Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I, p.25.

2 James, Lord Roberts, p.437, points out that the war was costing £7m. a day in 1918.

3 Maxse to Strachey, 9 June 1909, Str. S/10/9/10.

determined to avoid associating the party officially with national service.<sup>1</sup> Not only did the League fail to win round the Unionist leadership, the Unionist whip was applied. Thus the bill was faced with the united opposition of the two front benches.<sup>2</sup>

This unwonted alliance rendered certain the defeat of the bill when it received its second reading, which was spread over two days, 12 and 13 July.<sup>3</sup> Not that even the most optimistic compulsionist peers had expected the measure to become law.<sup>4</sup> The bill was introduced partly, as Lord Curzon, a vice-president of the League, explained in winding up the debate, 'as the recognised way of bringing our proposals before the public'.<sup>5</sup> What was also at issue was the principle of compulsion; and the League hoped that a strong demonstration of support in the Lords would give a lead to public opinion and a boost to its own popularity. But even there it was to be frustrated - by a Unionist amendment moved by the Duke of Northumberland:

That this House fully recognises the need of a Home Army amply sufficient to secure the country against all risk from invasion, and the advantage of giving to as large a part of the population as possible a sound groundwork of military training, but is not prepared to proceed further with a measure which, while involving unknown demands upon the national resources, would supersede the system accepted as sufficient by the military advisers of His Majesty's Government. 6

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1 Lansdowne to Roberts, 4 June 1909, Rob. 34/480.

2 'It looks as if the stress & burden of the day will fall on the official opposition, but I think that the line we ought to take is to help them as much as we can by damming the bill in unmeasured terms.' Lord Lucas to Esher, 8 July 1909, Esh. 5/31.

3 Hansard, 5th ser., (Lords) II. 255-352, 356-468.

4 Duke of Norfolk, *ibid.*, 272.

5 *ibid.*, 467.

6 *ibid.*, 276.

Once again the Government's 'military advisers' had been pressed into service on behalf of those who wished to evade the issue. Lord Ampthill denounced the resolution on these grounds and called for a clear expression of opinion - either for or against the principle of universal service.<sup>1</sup> To no avail. Unionist tactics had ensured that the debate would meander inconsequentially over familiar terrain before the predetermined platitude was endorsed.

Though the margin of defeat, 123-103, was narrow, it was all the more galling because, what the League journal presumed to be, 'the superior claims of party allegiance' had led fifteen members of the N.S.L. to vote for the amendment.<sup>2</sup> Newton named nine of these 'traitors' in a letter to Maxse: Devonshire, Albemarle, Leicester, Belhaven, Brassey, Crawshaw, Lawrence, St. Levan, Morley.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless the exercise was not entirely wasted. The discussion, inside and outside Parliament, had confirmed what had long been suspected: that, except as a first instalment, the proposals did not carry conviction from a military point of view. The League had thus, in Milner's words, been 'exposed to a crossfire' from the anti-compulsionists on one side and from those who regarded the proposals as insufficient on the other.<sup>4</sup> It was a dilemma which though recognized was never to be resolved.

The two most telling criticisms related to the length of training and the restriction to service for home defence. Lord Roberts had tried to anticipate these objections in the debate. He would never

1 *ibid.*, 315.

2 *Nation in Arms*, IV (Aug. 1909), p.305.

3 21 July 1909, Max. 460, R.327. The Morley referred to is, of course, the 4th Earl not the 1st Viscount.

4 Milner to Roberts, 20 Sept. 1909, Rob. 45/114.

have agreed to such a short period of training, he explained, had it not been for the calculation that the citizen army would, unlike the Regular Army, include in its numbers the most intelligent and best educated men in the land.<sup>1</sup> On this occasion he overlooked another standard argument - that under the League's scheme the recruits would already have received some pre-military training in schools and cadet corps. On the second point, whilst adamant that there would be no obligation to serve abroad, he argued that, in the event of an emergency, their experience of military life would not only increase the likelihood of men volunteering to do so, but also render them more effective in the field.<sup>2</sup> He supported this argument by reference to the South African War where the proportion of volunteers was one in five in the Militia and one in fifteen in the Yeomanry and Volunteers, compared with one in a thousand in the population as a whole. The flaw in this reasoning was that a willingness to serve in defence of the national interest was more obviously a condition than a product of membership of these bodies.

The **harking** back to the South African War was, however, indicative of another, and altogether more serious, weakness in the League's proposals: they apparently took little account of the greatly altered strategic situation which had developed since 1902. The case for demanding a scheme more in keeping with present demands was never more trenchantly put than in a 'Memorandum Embodying the Views and Proposals of Certain Members of the National Service League' which was forwarded by Lieut.-Col. C.G.F. Fagan, the honorary secretary for South Bucks., to George Shee in November 1909.<sup>3</sup> The memorandum argued

1 12 July 1909, Hansard, 5th ser., (Lords) II. 264.

2 *ibid.*, 267.

3 Printed, dated 1 Nov., forwarded 15 Nov. Mil. 137.

that even though such a change of policy would probably meet opposition and might even delay the realization of the League's objective, it would ultimately stand more chance of success 'than the policy of inveigling the country into the adoption of half measures which ... can never give us an Army of a quality in keeping with our requirements'. The dominant requirement was for a war with the German Empire in which Great Britain would be fighting for her survival as a great power.

We maintain therefore that it is unwise and suicidal to encourage our people in the belief that the limited training at present advocated by the League will suffice to fit them adequately to defend their country, and we hold that honesty in this, as in other matters, is the best policy.

Equally, service could not be limited to the United Kingdom, for what if Germany began by attacking Holland or France? The system devised by Spenser Wilkinson in his recently published Britain at Bay was suggested as a basis upon which the League might recast its propaganda.

The memorandum was put before the executive committee of the N.S.L. on 17 November 1909, but after 'the most careful consideration of all the circumstances of the case' the committee could see no reason to alter its programme.<sup>1</sup> Fagan and his colleagues were not appeased and reiterated their contention that it was

the business of the League to ascertain what our military requirements are, not what public opinion would have them to be, and having satisfied itself on this point, to approach our fellow-countrymen fearlessly with a plain unvarnished statement of facts calculated to appeal to their sound common sense. 2

The point at issue was not the country's defence needs: it was whether honesty really was the best policy.

1 Shee to Fagan (printed copy), 23 Nov. 1909, *ibid.*

2 Fagan to Shee (printed copy), 19 Dec. 1909, *ibid.*

Fagan later sent the memorandum and a copy of the correspondence with the League to Milner, recognizing in him 'a fearless and impartial statesman and patriot';<sup>1</sup> but even the 'fearless and impartial' Milner was not prepared to face the facts of the military situation - or perhaps, more accurately, gave priority to another set of 'facts'. Soon after the Lords debate, Viscount Midleton (Brodrick) had suggested the establishment of a commission which could report authoritatively on the requirements of a scheme of compulsory service, especially in regard to the period of training which he rightly believed was of central importance, since most other matters such as cost and the supply of officers hinged upon it.<sup>2</sup> Milner agreed that sooner or later this question and others would have to be answered, and revealed that in the discussions preceding the bill he had fought 'tooth and nail' for a longer period of training.<sup>3</sup>

But I am afraid of the effect on the public, & even on some of my own allies, just yet, if the answer should present us with something much more formidable than any of us have yet dared to formulate. 4

In short, it was precisely because he recognized the justice of the criticisms levelled against the existing scheme that he counselled against any inquiry or change for the time being.

Milner believed that in two years or so the process of conversion would have advanced to the stage where the public would be prepared to accept a more stringent programme. The events of the next few months seemed to bear him out. The defeat of the national service bill had been a setback, but not a disaster. In October 1909 the general council of the League reaffirmed its political neutrality and this was scrupulously observed during the general election campaign

1 5 Feb. 9110, *ibid.*

2 Midleton to Milner, 19 July 1909, Mil. 137. See also Midleton to Roberts, 24 Aug. 1909, Rob. 13/412.

3 Milner to Midleton, 27 July 1909, Mid. PRO. 30/67/24, f.1236.

4 *ibid.*, f.1237.

of January 1910.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this election the League was able to claim the support of 155 M.P.s, an increase of 112 over the Parliament elected in 1906.<sup>2</sup> At the same time N.S.L. membership was doubling, new branches were being formed, and paid officials were being appointed to every county in the land.

However, the political situation, which provided the grounds for optimism, was deceptive. The increase in parliamentary support for the principles of national service was a less spectacular breakthrough than it appeared to be, because to a large extent it was a measure of the Unionist party's electoral recovery. Although the Unionist leaders had spurned its overtures, the League retained a strong following among the rank and file; therefore the larger the Unionist representation in Parliament, the greater the support for compulsion.

Furthermore there were serious long-term implications for national service in the general trend of the political situation. The emergence (or re-emergence) of towering issues, such as the status of the House of Lords, industrial unrest, feminist agitation, and Irish home rule, which provoked extreme and unyielding passions and intensified political rivalry, militated against the interests of national service by diverting public attention from and downgrading the question. As usual, a few parliamentary candidates in 1910 were prepared to make a stand on the issue: C.S. Goldman, a long-standing member of the League, who was returned for Penryn and Falmouth in January, claimed to have come out 'fearlessly' on national service.<sup>3</sup> But more often it was played down or ignored, even by those who subscribed to League principles: one member of the League, Sir Mortimer Durand, had to give way before the opposition of another, Waldorf Astor, to any mention of national service in their joint election manifesto in Plymouth

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1 Nation in Arms, V (Feb. 1910), p.71.

2 See above, p.144.

3 Goldman to Maxse, 18 Feb. 1910, Max. 461, R.580.

in December 1909<sup>1</sup> - obviously discretion was the better part of valour in this constituency with its strong naval and dockyard connections. Yet if national service hardly figured in the general election campaigns of 1910, it was less the result of reticence on the part of the candidates than of the low priority accorded the issue by politicians and public alike.<sup>2</sup> And as the political crisis deepened, the time and energy of League members were absorbed in other matters. The task of arranging public meetings, difficult enough at the best of times (most branches tried to have at least one big meeting a year addressed by an outside speaker of some standing), became even more thankless. This reply, from Lord Ampthill in December 1910, was typical of many received by Frank Hilder in his efforts to find speakers for N.S.L. meetings in Essex:

We members of the House of Lords may be engaged in a life and death struggle to which we shall have to give all our thoughts and all our energies. That is why I hardly think it right to make any engagements in February. 3

Nor was the tense political atmosphere, in which the parties tended to close both their ranks and their minds, conducive to the dispassionate and judicious consideration of a question already bedevilled by a surfeit of prejudice. Recent events had confirmed that the best hope for legislation was on an inter-party basis, and the prospect of such a settlement dwindled as attitudes polarized - except, that is, for one brief period when, perversely, the chances of agreement were enhanced by the political disruption.

1 Durand to Roberts, 22 Dec. 1909, Rob. 26/60.

2 A recent, detailed study (548 pages) Neal Blewett, The Peers, The Parties And The People. The General Elections of 1910 (London 1972), does not mention national service. Certainly it does not appear in the index.

3 21 Dec. 1910, Hil. Blue-Red Book 72.



In the late summer of 1910, Lloyd George, casting about for a way out of the political impasse which had developed over the constitutional question, took up the idea of a coalition or national government. On 17 August he dictated a confidential memorandum on the subject in which he argued that solutions to the critical problems facing the country could only be found through the co-operation of the major parties.<sup>1</sup> He listed the matters requiring attention - a comprehensive survey which touched upon practically every important or controversial question - and speculated freely upon the policies which might command joint support. Under the heading, 'National Defence', he had this to say:

I am strongly of opinion that even the question of Compulsory Training should not be shirked. No Party dare touch it, because of the violent prejudices which would be excited even if it were suspected that a Government contemplated the possibility of establishing anything of the kind. For that reason it has never really been looked into by Statesmen in this country. The Swiss Militia system might be considered, and those liable to serve might be chosen by ballot. We have no such need as Continental countries labour under of organising an Army of 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 for defence; but we might aim at raising 500,000 armed Militia to supplement our Regular Army to provide against contingencies.

A spokesman for the National Service League could hardly have put the case more cogently.

Lloyd George did not show the memorandum to Asquith until mid-October.<sup>2</sup> A number of other party leaders were also sounded out, often with Winston Churchill and F.E. Smith acting as intermediaries.<sup>3</sup>

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1 [Confidential Memorandum on Coalition Government dictated by L.G. at Criccieth 1910, August. Typed. No heading.] Llo. C/16/9/1.

2 Lloyd George to Crewe (copy), 20 Oct. 1910, Llo. C/4/1/1.

3 See memorandum, n.d., in Sandars' handwriting, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49767, f.25.

Because of the highly confidential nature of the proposal it is not possible to say exactly how many people were consulted - probably about twenty<sup>1</sup> - but the general feeling appears to have been that the idea, though fraught with difficulties, was worthy of serious consideration.<sup>2</sup> On 29 October Lloyd George produced another, shorter memorandum, enumerating sixteen issues which a coalition government might take in hand.<sup>3</sup> A few days later, however, Balfour vetoed the idea of a coalition and effectively terminated any further discussion of the proposal.

In his War Memoirs Lloyd George ascribed Balfour's action to the advice of Akers-Douglas,<sup>4</sup> a former Unionist chief whip, but it is unlikely that this influence was as decisive as Lloyd George made out. Neither party in the summer of 1910 knew which way to turn. Initially, therefore, the principle embodied in the memorandum was seductive; ultimately the project would almost certainly have appeared impracticable. The finality of Balfour's rejection is itself instructive: discussion stopped immediately and the whole incident was soon forgotten.<sup>5</sup>

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1 This seems about right and is the estimate of Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, p.178.

2 See F.E. Smith to Austen Chamberlain, 20 Oct. 1910, Second Earl of Birkenhead, F.E. The Life of F.E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead (London, 1959), pp.156-7; Chamberlain to Smith, 21 Oct. 1910, Politics from Inside, pp.283-5; Crewe to Asquith, 22 Oct. 1910, Asq. 12, f.198; Grey to Asquith, 26 Oct. 1910, Asq. 12, f.214.

3 [L.G.'s coalition proposals. Typed.] Llo. C/16/9/3. Searle (pp.189-91) suggests that Lloyd George was playing a double game and that the differences between the August and October memoranda are explained by the fact that they were intended for different consumption: the first for the Conservatives, the second for the Liberals. This argument is not entirely convincing because the connivance of the Liberals consulted had been on the basis of the August memorandum.

4 (London, 1934), p.38.

5 References to the plan disappear completely from the correspondence of those who had been approached.

Lloyd George also attached an exaggerated importance in retrospect to his tentative recommendations on compulsory training, speculating on what might have happened in the Great War (or whether, indeed, war might have been avoided altogether in 1914) had they been adopted in 1910.<sup>1</sup> As matters stood, the significance of his initiative lay less in the details of specific proposals than in the shrewd and candid analysis of the weakness of the existing political structure and its inability to resolve controversial questions. That the August memorandum brought such a sympathetic reaction from senior politicians of both the main parties points to an obvious discrepancy between public protestation and private opinion; and nowhere was this better exemplified than in the matter of compulsory service.

Lloyd George's scheme represented what was probably the last slender chance before 1914 of introducing a measure for compulsion. Had the National Service League been privy to the deliberations, it would have recognized in their collapse the priority of party interests which had consistently inhibited and impeded its own efforts in the past two years. On 25 October 1910, L.S. Amery, a long-standing member of the N.S.L., expressed his anxiety that the constitutional conference, which had been meeting since June to try to settle the political crisis, should prove a success.<sup>2</sup>

If it does it will prove an admirable precedent for having a conference on the subject of defence and thus getting through national service on non-party lines. The more I consider the practical political aspects of the question the more I realize the extreme difficulty, almost hopelessness, of carrying national service through as a party measure, except indeed in the middle of a grave military crisis when it would probably be too late.

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1 War Memoirs, pp.33-9.

2 Amery to Roberts, Rob. 1/22.

Alas for Amery and the N.S.L., a fortnight later<sup>1</sup> the conference broke up without reaching agreement.

The failure of the consultations and the ending of the party truce saw a renewal of party conflict which was at times to threaten to undermine the entire political system. Disillusioned by the past, dejected by the present, and despondent about the future, the N.S.L. was also beginning to shed its restraints. The whole question of national service was entering a new era.

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1 On 10 Nov.

CHAPTER V

The realization of the massive political obstacles to the enactment of national service left the movement at a low ebb in 1910-11. However, it was gradually to be revived and the whole dispute intensified by the emergence in these years of the two separate, but closely related, issues which were henceforth to dominate the controversy: the value and competence of the Territorial Army and the question of British military intervention in Europe. Both had been smouldering beneath the surface for some years, artificially suppressed on the one hand by the obligation to give the new organization a chance to prove itself and on the other by the Government's reluctance to acknowledge the logical outcome of its own foreign policy. The crucial event in bringing these issues out into the open was the Agadir crisis of 1911, which not only reinvigorated the compulsionists, but also shook the complacency of their opponents.

On the whole the development of the Territorial Army during its first two years was encouraging. Equally welcome from a political point of view was its cheapness, which helped towards the annual reduction in the Army estimates from £29,813,000 in 1905-6 to £27,435,000 in 1909-10. However, in preparing the estimates for 1910-11, Haldane was obliged to ask for an addition of £400,000 for the Territorials. 'That the reductions have now ceased', he explained to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'is due to the fact that the rotten tooth has been scooped out and the process of filling in is proceeding'.<sup>1</sup> Undeniably, and partly as a result of the same fears and pressures which had swollen the membership of the N.S.L.,<sup>2</sup>

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1 'Army Estimates, 1910-11', 4 Dec. 1909, Cab. 37/101/156, p.2.

2 See above, chapt. IV, p.137.

1909 had been a boom year for Territorial recruitment: between 1 October 1908 and 1 October 1909 the strength of the Force had risen from 197,213 to 270,041.<sup>1</sup> If this trend could be maintained there was every prospect of the Force reaching its establishment (312,812) in the near future.

Instead, there was a slump in recruiting in the following year and the strength of the Force on 1 October 1910 showed a marginal decrease, to 267,096.<sup>2</sup> At the same time there was mounting criticism of the Force in Parliament and elsewhere, not only over the shortfall in recruitment, but also with regard to training, attendance at camp, and musketry standards. The period of grace, of exemption from disparaging comment, granted to the Territorial Army during its formative years was drawing to a close.

In September 1910, Lord Esher contributed an article to the National Review on what he saw as a general decline in voluntary effort.<sup>3</sup> Referring specifically to the Territorial Army, the creation of 'far the ablest and most successful War Minister this country has ever had',<sup>4</sup> he expressed the firm opinion that the numbers required annually for that Force would not be forthcoming. In his view the nation had reached the limit of its yield and the electorate would have to choose 'between leaving the forces of the country below the minimum admitted by every one to be necessary and imposing by law upon our children the duty to bear arms in its defence'.<sup>5</sup> Esher had long been a believer in compulsion for the young. He had signed a note of agreement with Sir George Taubman Goldie's scheme for national military education appended to the Elgin Report in 1903<sup>6</sup> and had often

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1 'The Annual Return of the Territorial Force for the Year 1910', 20 Mar. 1911, [Cd. 5482], BPP (1911), XLVI, p.110.

2 *ibid.*

3 'The Voluntary Principle', LVI, pp.41-7.

4 *ibid.*, p.45.

5 *ibid.*, p.47.

6 See above, chapt. II, p.46.

been active in trying to raise funds on behalf of compulsory training.<sup>1</sup> Latterly, however, as chairman of the County of London Territorial Association, he had been in the forefront of the campaign to strengthen the Territorials. Moreover, as he was known to be a close associate of Haldane and a member of the Defence Committee, his criticism was especially damaging.

The Secretary of State had, naturally, been uneasy about publication, fearing that the article would be received 'with a chorus of applause by the National Service League newspapers'.<sup>2</sup> And when it did appear, the article earned the displeasure of both the Prime Minister and the King, who deployed arguments strikingly similar to those which had been adduced against Lord Roberts in 1905. Asquith thought that, as a member of the C.I.D., Esher 'ought to refrain from writing controversial articles on national defence',<sup>3</sup> whilst Knollys told him that

H.M. conceives the point is not whether what you have written will do good or not, but if it is advisable that any member of the Committee should send articles to the Press or to magazines on subjects which are akin to questions which might be brought before the Committee. 4

The main difference between Roberts' and Esher's positions was that the latter was not a salaried member of the Committee.

The reaction, both public and private, to the article was so predictable that the bemused and aggrieved air which Esher assumed afterwards was less than convincing.<sup>5</sup> 'All the world knows that you

1 Roberts placed great hopes on Esher's capacity to extract money from his rich acquaintances in 1905, 1906, and 1907, but Esher's efforts bore little fruit. Not that he didn't try. On 30 Sept. 1906, with magnificent effrontery, he wrote to William Waldorf Astor, a man he hardly knew: 'I want £100,000 - and I want it unconditionally and without any question as to the uses to which it will be put.' (copy), Esh. 19/6, f.30. The correspondence dragged on for a year before Astor backed out.

2 Haldane to Esher, 24 Aug. 1910, Esh. 4/3.

3 Asquith to Haldane (copy), 4 Sept. 1910, Esh. 4/3.

4 8 Sept. 1910, Esh. 4/3.

5 See his letters to Haldane, 6 Sept. and 8 Sept., Hal. 5909, f.45 and f.53.

have worked with me from the beginning at the Territorial Scheme', Haldane reminded him.<sup>1</sup>

But - and here is the substance and the sadness of it - you suddenly declare, in the pleasantest language certainly, but that does not make it better - that the underlying hypothesis is unsound and that the scheme will, in your opinion, fail to secure the necessary numbers, i.e. fail in toto.

Whilst it is certain that by 1910 Esher believed that the failure of the Territorial Force - which, incidentally, he had always prophesied<sup>2</sup> - was imminent,<sup>3</sup> it is difficult to fathom his purpose in writing the article. To some extent it was a reaffirmation of the independence he was at all times so anxious to preserve. Arguably it was also a calculated piece of mischief-making. With virtually the whole of the British press open to a man of his reputation, why else - for the article was unsolicited<sup>4</sup> - would he have chosen the National Review, a journal dedicated to the destruction of Haldane and all his works?

Haldane had worked tirelessly on behalf of the Territorial Army and had built up an emotional, in addition to his intellectual, commitment to it. Unwilling to accept the substance of Esher's argument, which would have been to call into question the fundamental soundness of the scheme, he consoled himself by attributing the present difficulties to the malign influence of the National Service League. The possibility that the mass of the male population was simply not prepared to sacrifice its hard-earned and meagre leisure time to the Territorial Army was inadmissible; all that was required for the Force to flourish was an end to sniping criticism and a certain amount of tinkering with the

1 7 Sept. 1910, Esh. 4/3.

2 See, for example, Esher to Kitchener (copy), 4 Oct. 1906, Esh. 4/1, f.40; and Henry Wilson Diary, 20 Apr. 1908.

3 As early as Jan. 1910 he was apparently expressing this view to Lord Roberts: Henry Wilson Diary, 18 Jan. 1910.

4 See the note which accompanied the article when it was sent to Maxse, 18 Aug. 1910, Max. 462, R.696.



organization. Thus the N.S.L., which originally had served as a bogey to rally support to the Territorial scheme, was now used as the scape-goat for its failings.

Whilst some League members undoubtedly did set out to denigrate the T.A., the effect upon recruitment was slight. Moreover, some of the criticism, especially of the methods employed to raise men, was merited. Haldane's public approval of the decision by the Alliance Assurance Company early in 1909 to make it a condition of employment that its men join the Territorial Army,<sup>1</sup> for example, was condemned not only by the League, but also by Radical and Labour M.P.s such as Arthur Henderson for whom it was 'an insidious form of enforced military service'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, because it could not afford to alienate its substantial Territorial membership, the League at this stage still exercised the greatest caution in its dealings with and pronouncements upon the Territorial Army. Thus, in 1911, to counter the allegation that it was impeding the progress of the Force, it published figures to show that over five hundred of its supporters were prominent Territorials.<sup>3</sup> It was only later, in 1913-14, when the risk of resignations was much reduced through the widespread disillusionment within the T.A. itself, that the League was able to adopt an openly hostile attitude.

It was Haldane's conviction that the N.S.L. was sabotaging his scheme which led him to arrange for the publication in the autumn of 1910 of a long memorandum on the subject of compulsion, written by Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton, until recently Adjutant-General.<sup>4</sup> The Secretary of

1 Parliamentary answer, 22 Feb. 1909, Hansard, 5th ser., I. 413.

2 8 Mar. 1909, ibid., II. 58.

3 Nation in Arms, VI (June, 1911), p.284, claimed 'at least 494', and the July issue, p.355, brought the total up to 580. In Hil. (Maroon Book 70) there is a typed list, which though undated was certainly compiled at this time, of 426 names arranged in counties.

4 Hamilton was Adjutant-General 1 June 1909 - 1 Aug. 1910.

State contributed an introduction and the book was entitled Compulsory Service. Its appearance gave rise to a bitter controversy which was concerned less with the content of the work than with the propriety of its publication.

The memorandum was composed at Haldane's request. Hamilton claimed afterwards that it never crossed his mind that it might be published, though he thought it 'quite possible that he [Haldane] might show it to his friends in the Cabinet and possibly on the Opposition Front Benches'.<sup>1</sup> Such a statement is difficult to reconcile with the document's length and style. The memorandum, excluding appendices, was nearly 25,000 words long and written in a style which, even allowing for Hamilton's literary pretensions, was more suitable for public presentation than private circulation. Moreover it was not an impromptu, single-handed composition, for Hamilton had received considerable assistance from the War Office, notably from Col. Ellison and Charles Harris, in verifying figures and collecting information and opinion, much of which was incorporated in the final paper.<sup>2</sup> Thus, whilst it may have been true that Hamilton did not write the memorandum specifically for publication, it is inconceivable that he should have been totally unaware of the possibility of it being put to a wider purpose than originally envisaged.

For Haldane the publication of Compulsory Service provided a release for his frustration and resentment against the National Service League. Shortly after the book appeared he told Hamilton:

Lord Bobs is doing all he can to down the Territorial Force and the only way to meet him is your doctrine of the offensive. I think we have rained shot and shell into him and I do not intend to let him alone. 3

His letters during the weeks following publication, particularly those to Hamilton,<sup>4</sup> have a facetious, spiteful and prematurely triumphant

1 Hamilton to Sir Evelyn Wood (copy), 7 Jan. 1911, Ham. 7/2/3.

2 The assistance he received is clearly shown in Ham. 7/2/2.

3 26 Nov. 1910, Ham. 7/2/4.

4 See the file Ham. 7/2/4.

tone; gloatingly he distributed complimentary copies to all and sundry (little wonder that the first edition of 2,000 sold out so quickly!)

Hamilton was less buoyant. His employment in such a polemical enterprise exposed him to personal recrimination and public attack against which, as a serving soldier, he was unable fully to defend himself. But the most distressing consequence was that he found himself ranged against Lord Roberts, for the relationship between the two men had hitherto been based on the deepest respect and affection, akin to that between father and son. Roberts' latest biographer asserts that apart from the death of his only son, at Colenso in 1899, the publication of Compulsory Service was 'the most cruel personal blow that Roberts ever suffered'.<sup>1</sup> The blow was not softened by the realization that Hamilton had written the book whilst accompanying Roberts on his ceremonial mission to the capitals of Europe to announce the accession of King George V.<sup>2</sup> Apparently the Field-Marshal could not bring himself to write to Hamilton and it was left to Lady Roberts to convey to him, in a long and emotional letter of 9 December 1910, what his 'devotion to ... [Haldane's] scheme' had cost him in the estimation of his friends and many of the public: 'people will not believe that the views you now profess can be honestly held by you, as they are so absolutely irreconcilable with your own pronouncements formerly'.<sup>3</sup> Hamilton replied, explaining the circumstances under which the book had been written.<sup>4</sup> He had realized, he said, that as a consequence he would find himself in open opposition to about nine-tenths of his friends and especially to Lord Roberts 'who has been far more to me than any ordinary friend', but he denied that he had trimmed his opinions to suit his political master. Happily, and to the credit of both men, their

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1 James, p.449.

2 17 Aug. - 12 Sept. The itinerary is in Noe. 15A; Admiral Noel was also a member of the party.

3 Ham. 7/2/5.

4 (copy), 18 Dec. 1910, Ham. 7/2/5.

friendship and mutual high regard was to weather this crisis.<sup>1</sup>

The charge of inconsistency, so often brought against Hamilton during this time, was unfair. It arose partly from a misunderstanding of his essay, which was not an objective treatise on the subject, but a consideration of the applicability of compulsion to the defensive requirements of the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> In principle he was not against compulsion. On the contrary, he had in the past often commended compulsory systems overseas, and would again in the future; but where he did so he qualified his endorsement in some way: by reference to the stage of historical development, as in Japan,<sup>3</sup> or to the strategic situation, as in Australasia.<sup>4</sup> He was, in addition, a staunch advocate of compulsory training for the young.<sup>5</sup> Thus whilst his views were certainly unorthodox, they were consistent.<sup>6</sup>

1 Hamilton's tremendous regard for Roberts is best seen in The Commander, A. Farrar-Hockley (ed.), published posthumously (London, 1957).

2 The essay began: 'DEAR MR. HALDANE, You have asked me to consider how far, if at all, compulsory service could be made applicable to our Imperial system.' 2nd edition, (London, 1911), p.43.

3 See A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book (London, 1905), p.12.

4 When he visited Australia and New Zealand in 1914 to inspect the workings of their new defence acts he received many letters from opponents of the systems who expected, mistakenly, to enlist his support: see file Ham. 14/1/5. Later in the year he wrote to Evelyn Wood: '... were I an Australian, I should always have been an advocate of compulsory service. People inhabiting a vast continent, and standing on it at about one to the square mile, with the Japs looking at them over the Pacific three hundred to the square mile, must have compulsory service, ... But the British are not in that position.' (copy), 26 June 1914, Ham. 7/9/72.

5 See his National Life and National Training (London, 1913).

6 In this respect it is instructive to read his evidence before the Norfolk Commission, 26 May 1903, Minutes I, pp.43-54.

In his defence of the voluntary system Hamilton differed from most of his colleagues in the highest ranks of the Army. He himself admitted that 'the entire G.[eneral] S.[taff] at the War Office with one, or possibly two, exceptions are either in favour of National defence [service?] or of Conscription on the pure Continental basis'.<sup>1</sup> It was because he was such a rarity that he was invited to write the memorandum in the first place; and in spite of Haldane's frequent references to his experience as Adjutant-General,<sup>2</sup> his tenure of that office counted for little. There were four former Adjutants-General still alive in 1910,<sup>3</sup> all of whom had held the post longer than Hamilton, including his immediate predecessor, Gen. Sir Charles Douglas, who had been Adjutant-General for nearly five and a half years compared with Hamilton's fourteen months.

In publishing Compulsory Service Haldane had offended, if not against the letter, then against the spirit of the regulations and conventions which prescribed the public expression of views on military subjects by Army personnel. He compounded the error in the second edition by printing, as an appendix, an Admiralty memorandum on invasion above the initials of the First Sea Lord, Sir Arthur Wilson.<sup>4</sup> These 'Notes Containing the Admiralty View Of The Risk of Invasion' had originally been supplied to the War Office for use in a debate in the Lords which was scheduled for November, but which did not take place because of the impending election. The memorandum asserted that the disposition of the Navy in home waters and the vulnerability of a fleet of transports to submarine and torpedo attack virtually ruled out the possibility of invasion. In his anxiety to include it in the second

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1 Hamilton to Lady Roberts (copy), 18 Dec. 1910, Ham. 7/2/5.

2 For example in the introduction to Compulsory Service, pp.9-12, and in the Commons, 14 Mar. 1911, Hansard, 5th ser., XXII. 2075.

3 F.M. Viscount Wolseley (Oct. 1885 - Oct. 1890), F.M. Sir Henry Evelyn Wood (Oct. 1897 - Oct. 1901), Gen. Sir T. Kelly-Kenny (Oct. 1901 - Feb. 1904), Gen. Sir Charles Douglas (Feb. 1904 - June 1909).

4 pp.209-212.

edition Haldane had overlooked the fact that Admiralty memoranda were as a rule unsigned - an oversight which understandably made Wilson uneasy.<sup>1</sup> The War Minister had also failed to secure the prior permission of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, who was recuperating after an operation when the book went to press. He had, he later explained to McKenna, consulted Wilson who 'was sure that you would approve'.<sup>2</sup>

When the new Parliament assembled in February 1911 the book was soon a main subject of dispute. Was it in any sense an official work, asked Arthur Lee on 8 February, and would the permission granted to Ian Hamilton be extended to other officers on the active list who might have very different views?<sup>3</sup> Haldane replied that the work was not an official publication and the authorization of other communications was governed by King's Regulations. A few days later Sir Clement Kinloch-Cooke asked who was to receive the profits arising from the publication; and when the Prime Minister disclosed that as far as he knew Haldane would receive them, Austen Chamberlain requested that Wilson's memorandum should be published as a parliamentary paper, so that M.P.s could have access to it without paying a royalty to the Secretary of State.<sup>4</sup> The controversy showed no signs of abating: the book was the subject of two debates in the Lords early in March,<sup>5</sup> and there were repeated references to it in both houses.

Behind the welter of words and debating points was a serious principle, which Balfour elucidated in the Commons on 13 March. He regarded the publication of Compulsory Service as a dangerous departure in public

1 Wilson to Haldane, 16 Jan. 1911, Hal. 5909, fs.76-7.

2 Haldane to McKenna, 23 Dec. 1910, McK. 3/22, f.42.

3 Hansard, 5th ser., XXI. 408.

4 13 Feb. 1911, *ibid.*, 691.

5 1 Mar., 'Sir A.K. Wilson's Memorandum', *ibid.*, (Lords) VII. 234-50;  
6 Mar. 'The Territorial Army and Home Defence', *ibid.*, 290-302.

life because of its effect upon the doctrine of cabinet and ministerial responsibility.

You entirely break down your whole system if you, in order to buttress up the policy of the moment, drag into the field of political controversy the private minutes and communications of those who are your expert advisers. I think it is an unhappy precedent. 1

He stressed that his complaint was not against the book, which he had found worth reading, but against its publication.

The next day Haldane introduced what were to be his last Army estimates in the Commons. The speech was by his normal standards a short one, and a large part of it was devoted to answering the criticism of Compulsory Service.<sup>2</sup> He was, he declared, 'totally unrepentant'. After a brief summary of the genesis of the book, he turned to Balfour's criticism. But instead of answering the main point, he set out to obscure the issue: by misrepresenting what Balfour had said, charging him with wishing to prevent any officer on the active list from ever expressing a view on a military subject; by scornfully suggesting that the leader of the Opposition ought to be grateful to him for his assistance in shepherding straying Unionist compulsionists back towards the fold; and by absurdly citing, as a precedent for officers pronouncing on disputatious matters, the published volumes of evidence given before the Elgin Commission. His evasions and the note of arrogance he struck in the speech did little to conciliate his opponents.

In their anger they struck back, not only at Haldane, but also at those associated with him in the enterprise. The intensity of the feelings aroused is well illustrated by an ignoble attack upon Hamilton's integrity, made in his maiden speech by Lieut.-Gen. Sir Reginald Pole-Carew later in the day:

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1 *ibid.*, XXII. 1973.

2 14 Mar. 1911, *ibid.*, 2073-7.

I have had considerable experience of the writer in former days, and I think the book is very like himself, flighty and unreliable. The book was written chiefly for the advertisement of the writer, and incidentally, no doubt, for the satisfaction of the right hon. Gentleman. 1

Haldane protested at such an imputation being made in Sir Ian's absence. However, as Earl Winterton, another Unionist M.P., pleaded on a subsequent occasion, before embarking upon yet another diatribe against Hamilton:

It seems to me that the old and salutary rule that an officer in high command, either in the Army or Navy, should not be attacked in this House where he has no opportunity of replying, carries with it an equal code of honour, that officers in high command should not consent to write extremely contentious books dealing with extremely contentious questions. Therefore, when officers choose to throw themselves into the arena of party, they must not complain if those who sit on the other side of the House criticize their doings. 2

In theory Winterton's argument was sound; in practice it was virtually impossible for officers to refuse the requests of their political superiors. Neither Hamilton nor Wilson had chosen to involve himself in political controversy: the decisions - and the responsibility - were Haldane's.

Soon after the appearance of Compulsory Service the National Service League determined to publish a rejoinder. In December 1911 Milner advised against too much haste in replying<sup>3</sup> and was relieved a month later, when the second edition, containing Wilson's memorandum, 'much more important than Ian Hamilton's stuff', came out, that his advice had been heeded.<sup>4</sup> The reply, Fallacies and Facts,<sup>5</sup> was in

1 *ibid.*, 2171.

2 22 Mar. 1911, *ibid.*, XXIII. 479.

3 Milner to Roberts, 26 Dec. 1910, Rob. 45/120.

4 *ibid.*, 17 Jan. 1911, Rob. 45/121.

5 Fallacies and Facts. An Answer to 'Compulsory Service' (London, 1911).



three parts: the first, 'The Nation's Peril', was written by Roberts; the second, 'The Military and Naval Situation', by 'a well-known writer on problems of Imperial Defence', in fact - and this must rank as the worst-kept secret of 1911 - L.S. Amery;<sup>1</sup> and the third, 'The Argument from History', also anonymously, by J.A. Cramb, Professor of Modern History at Queen's College, London. The inclusion of this last part, which 'made mincemeat' (or so Lady Roberts believed<sup>2</sup>) of Hamilton's numerous historical allusions and analogies, testifies to the immense faith Edwardians possessed in the lessons of history.

Though Roberts and his co-writers tried to strike a balance between a precipitate reply and leaving their opponents unanswered for too long, Fallacies and Facts, published in March, did bear some signs of hasty compilation. The book naturally suffered a loss of cohesiveness from being the product of three pens, but there was little excuse for the duplication of argument and example.<sup>3</sup> For all that, the main weaknesses of the work were to be found in the long middle section, which Amery used to parade his personal analysis of and solution to the problems of imperial defence. In an attempt to guard against virtually every contingency, including even a war with the United States in defence of Canada, he produced a scheme<sup>4</sup> which, though not without its

1 Everyone seemed to know that Part II was to be written by Amery. Haldane suspected that Amery was involved as early as 28 Jan. (Haldane to Hamilton, Ham. 7/2/4), and Amery confirmed the suspicion on 22 Feb. (ibid.).

2 Lady Roberts to Hamilton, 5 Mar. 1911, Ham. 7/2/5.

3 For instance, the Norfolk recommendation quoted by Roberts (p.3) and by Amery (p.108); and Amery's references to the armies of Gustavus Adolphus and Napoleon (pp.165-6) and Cramb's similar references (pp.215-6), in support of the view that conscript armies could be used far from home.

4 pp.156-64.

merits, would have added between £5-6 million to the Army estimates. It was, as Haldane was quick to point out, 'preparing for the logically possible instead of the reasonably probable'.<sup>1</sup> However, the most damaging point about Amery's plan was that it differed from - indeed went far beyond - the published proposals of the N.S.L., so much so that Roberts had to intervene in a polite footnote and disown the scheme on behalf of the League.<sup>2</sup> In a volume whose main purpose was to propagate and defend the ideas of the National Service League divergent opinions were manifestly out of place.

Yet, even without Amery's aberration, it would have been impossible to produce a book which set out categorically the case for compulsion. Likewise it was impossible to represent the counter-arguments compactly. The issue of compulsion was never straightforward and clear cut: on each side there were many shades of opinion and emotional overtones, and all the time the context of the argument was shifting. Thus, although the opposing forces in 1911 lined up dutifully, if uneasily, behind Hamilton and Roberts, the works for which these men were responsible can in no way be regarded as reasoned and definitive digests of the opposing cases.

The thesis of Compulsory Service, obscured by Hamilton's ornamental prose and inapposite ramblings, was relatively simple: the voluntary system was vital for the preservation of the British Empire. Whereas compulsory service was defensive, voluntary service was adventurous and expansive.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the former was

less aggressive, less of a danger to the world at large, seeing that, by its very nature, it is a weapon that cannot be lightly used, and that its statesmen are constantly sacrificing their Imperial ambitions on the altar of home defence. I beg of you [he continued] earnestly to ponder over the words I have here italicised. The idea they attempt to convey lies at root of the whole problem we are discussing. <sup>4</sup>

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1 3 Apr. 1911, Hansard, 5th ser., (Lords) VII. 844.

2 p.158.

3 p.49.

4 p.50.

Military forces for the defence of distant frontiers had to be raised on a voluntary basis. 'No instance can be drawn from history of the successful employment for such purposes of men compelled to serve against their will.'<sup>1</sup> Whatever happened, therefore, Britain would need to recruit volunteers to defend her overseas Empire. The crucial question was: could a compulsory and a voluntary system exist side by side? The continental analogy, which he dealt with at some length, suggested that they could not.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the one domestic experience which afforded some guidance on the probable effect of a compulsory system on recruiting for the Regular Army, Brodrick's experiment with three-year enlistment, indicated that an insufficient number would wish to extend their service beyond the obligatory term.<sup>3</sup> It was Hamilton's firm opinion that the acceptance of the proposals of the National Service League as they stand at present would within two years bring about something very like disaster in the recruiting market for the Regular Army. <sup>4</sup>

If it had been possible to establish conclusively that compulsion would damage the Regular Army, the National Service League would have conceded defeat, for the majority of its members shared Hamilton's imperialist sentiments. Although the League demanded compulsion only for home defence, it insisted that this would strengthen the defence of the Empire as a whole: first, by liberating the Regular Army and the Royal Navy for their proper strategic functions and, secondly, by providing power of expansion in a national crisis.<sup>5</sup> The argument, therefore, turned upon whether enforced acquaintance with the military life increased or diminished the taste for soldiering. Hamilton contended that 'the free-born Briton tends to become incurably prejudiced against any form

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1 p.54.

2 pp.63-83.

3 pp.84-8.

4 p.113.

5 Arguments repeated in Fallacies and Facts, pp.20-1.

of work or even amusement he may be forced into'.<sup>1</sup> Roberts, needless to say, had no doubt 'that compulsory military training, as advocated by the National Service League, far from interfering with, would materially assist the solution of the recruiting problem'.<sup>2</sup>

The above argument was typically inconclusive. Since both sides stressed the uniqueness of Britain's strategic situation, the numerous analogies, historical and contemporary, drawn to support their cases had little real bearing on the subject. The scarcity of relevant, verifiable evidence reduced the matter to one of personal conviction. It is improbable that there were many converts either way.

The war of words then, was indecisive. But, in other respects, the encounter was a defeat for the Secretary of State. Haldane had initiated the controversy for a clearly defined purpose: to weaken, if not destroy, the power of the N.S.L., which in his eyes was thwarting the advance of the Territorial Force. The gambit failed. Instead, it introduced a note of acrimony into the proceedings, which was scarcely apparent before, and assisted the League by bringing the whole question to the fore of public discussion at a time when it was struggling to compete with a general election and a constitutional crisis.

A notable feature of the dispute was the way in which both sides played down the possible involvement of the Army in a continental war. In Compulsory Service Hamilton did briefly consider the military arrangements which would be demanded should Britain be obliged to adopt a more active European role, and these involved a conscript army raised on the German model;<sup>3</sup> but his main concern was how 'to perfect the organisation of our military strength for Imperial purposes'.<sup>4</sup> The

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1 Compulsory Service, p.89.

2 Fallacies and Facts, pp.34-5.

3 pp.135-6.

4 p.142.

authors of Fallacies and Facts were more willing to face up to the strategic implications of the events of the previous decade and both Roberts, in a passage drafted significantly by Henry Wilson,<sup>1</sup> and Amery<sup>2</sup> underlined the importance of the balance of power. Amery went even further anticipating a German attack on France through Belgium in which Britain would be required to reinforce the French left flank.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the general bias of the book was such that Europe came a poor third after imperial and home defence. This order of precedence reflected current official priorities. Not for the first, nor for the last, time Britain's prevision of war was adjusted to accommodate the size and dispositions of the existing defence forces, rather than vice versa. Those who remonstrated against this state of affairs were branded as alarmists, which, in the face of official obduracy and complacency, they often became. The widespread abhorrence of 'continental conscription', by which was meant the kind of system which existed in France and Germany, made it prudent for British governments to avoid European commitments - or at least not advertise them - since they carried with them the risk that Britain might have to raise forces on a scale commensurate with her allies. In practice, however, this danger was avoided by pretending that no obligations existed, by pleading the impossibility of adding to the present burden of defence, or best of all by arguing that the military and naval organization as it stood could exercise a decisive impact on a continental war.

To all intents and purposes by 1911 Britain was, under certain circumstances, committed to maintain the European balance of power - not by any formal agreement but by a sober assessment of national self-interest. The diplomacy of the period 1902-7, especially the Anglo-French

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1 pp.44-9. See Henry Wilson Diary, 22 Jan. and 28 Mar. 1911.

2 pp.77-81.

3 p.118.

agreements of 1904, had transformed Britain's relations with the continental powers. The original motive was to liquidate sources of colonial friction in a world where British forces were dangerously over-extended, and Lansdowne, Foreign Secretary 1900-05, was little concerned with Europe.<sup>1</sup> But the first Moroccan crisis brought about changes in defence and foreign policy which even Lansdowne, had he remained in office, would have found difficult to avert and his successor, Grey, was less inclined to resist. The decision to uphold the entente against the German challenge over Morocco drew Britain and France closer together and widened the rift between Britain and Germany. The price which had to be paid - and which in the early weeks of 1906 Grey was evidently prepared to pay<sup>2</sup> - for the survival of the entente was a readiness to go to France's aid in the event of war with Germany.

Soldiers and sailors were agreed that in a war with Germany, which Britain was obliged to fight on her own, major land operations were pointless. Britain's power of offence, Lieut.-Col. E.A. Altham, A.Q.M.G., declared in 1903, was limited to the destruction of Germany's sea-borne trade and the seizure of her colonies and Heligoland.<sup>3</sup> Under the circumstances, this was, and continued to be, the only sensible course, for as Grey himself explained in 1907:

During recent years, the proportion between the British army and the great Continental armies has come to be such that our army cannot be regarded as a means of offence against the mainland of a great Continental power. For our ability to bring pressure to bear upon our enemies in war we have, therefore, to rely on the navy alone. <sup>4</sup>

Yet by the time Grey wrote this, an important change, one for which the Foreign Minister himself was in no small way responsible, had occurred:

1 Steiner, pp.47-8; Monger, pp.184-5.

2 Monger, pp.267-72.

3 'Memorandum on the military policy to be adopted in a war with Germany', 10 Feb. 1903, Cab. 38/4/9, p.8.

4 Foreign Office memorandum, 3 June 1907, Cab. 37/89/65, p.2.

the likelihood now was that if Britain was engaged in a European war, it would be in alliance with France. The first Moroccan crisis had thus opened up the prospect of a more positive role for the Army: 'the right to participate on the Continent in a Franco-German war'.<sup>1</sup> Provided the alignment formed in 1905-6 endured, the crucial question henceforth was whether Britain should pursue a predominantly military or naval strategy in support of France. Strictly the question remained open until the very outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>2</sup> In practice the collaboration and collusion, both diplomatic and military, which had shaped the course of Anglo-French relations since 1904, had determined the case in favour of the military.

In the years immediately following the first Moroccan crisis each service conducted its own strategic planning without reference to the other. Thus, whilst the General Staff was scheming to intervene on the continent in support of France,<sup>3</sup> the Admiralty, under Sir John Fisher, was preparing for operations against the German coasts. The responsibility for this absurd situation rested partly with Fisher who had turned against the C.I.D., the body which had been designed to co-ordinate defence planning, when it had wavered in its support for Admiralty policy in 1905-6.<sup>4</sup> But most of all it rested with the Government, and above all the Prime Ministers, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, who as heads of the C.I.D. had condoned this policy of drift. Their procrastination was deliberate; at this stage, a firm, official decision on so sensitive an issue as Britain's participation in a European war would have been politically tactless.

1 Williamson, p.45.

2 Cameron Hazlehurst, Politicians At War. July 1914 to May 1915 (London, 1971), p.80.

3 At this stage in Belgium: John Gooch, The Plans of War. The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916 (London, 1974), pp.282-4.

4 Nicholas d'Ombrain, War Machinery and High Policy. Defence administration in peacetime Britain 1902-14, (London, 1973), pp.11-12.

Besides the merits of alternative strategies, service pride and the allocation of scarce resources were also at stake in this dispute. The strength of the Admiralty's position was that it perpetuated myths about the efficacy of British naval power and offered a painless way of waging great wars.<sup>1</sup> The weakness was that whilst in the short term the Navy might prevent defeat, it could not achieve victory. And even Britain's naval ascendancy would be shortlived if Germany controlled the industrial and maritime resources of most of Europe. If it really was in Britain's interests to assist France in order to maintain the balance of power, the case for a continental strategy was unanswerable.<sup>2</sup> The findings of the sub-committee of the C.I.D., which did eventually consider the question in 1908-9, afforded a qualified endorsement of the Army's stan point.<sup>3</sup> The sub-committee did not consider that 'such pressure as could be exerted by means of naval force alone would be felt sufficiently soon to save France in the event of that country being attacked in overwhelming force'.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the committee concluded that the General Staff's plan, involving the dispatch to France on the outbreak of war of an army of four divisions and a cavalry division, was 'a valuable one', and the General Staff was accordingly authorized to 'work out all the necessary details'.<sup>5</sup> Since the C.I.D. had no executive function, the report, though encouraging, was not decisive. The Admiralty and the War Office continued on their separate ways and, in the absence of inter-service co-operation, no truly effective strategic planning was yet possible.

The demand for compulsion was closely linked in the public mind with a continental policy, and as the anticipation of a British military commitment to Europe advanced from faint suspicion to threatening

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1 Correlli Barnett, Britain and Her Army, p.xix.

2 Strictly speaking the Admiralty was also 'continentalist'. The issue between the Army and Navy was where and how the British effort should be made. However, the expression 'continental strategy' has come to mean large-scale military intervention.

3 'Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the Military Needs of the Empire', 24 July 1909, Cab. 38/15/15.

4 *ibid.*, p.2.

5 *ibid.*, p.4.



reality, the conviction grew that the policy was largely the product of compulsionist pressure. The Daily News, for example, in its review of Fallacies and Facts, was quite sure that 'those who want conscription want it as something which will enable them to intervene decisively in the affairs of the Continent'.<sup>1</sup> This line of reasoning overlooked the fact that the national service movement antedated by several years the policy of continental involvement. The N.S.L. claimed that the adoption of its scheme would strengthen Britain's overall military capability: whatever the problem - home defence, India, Egypt - the League attempted to demonstrate the pertinence of its proposals. It so happened that from 1911 onwards attention was focused increasingly on Europe. Undeniably, the urgency and the nature of the European problem lent weight to the pleas of the compulsionists, but the problem itself was not of their making; as with the invasion question, they merely responded to a situation which had arisen independently of their activities. Had it been the defence of Mongolia, the Daily News would equally have been able to report that those who demanded compulsion did so because they wished to defend Mongolia.

A distinction must, of course, be drawn between the proposals of the League and conscription. Most senior Army officers, given a free choice, would have chosen conscription. 'The G.[eneral] S.[taff] has plumped for two years' training and against the National Service scheme', Haldane wrote to Hamilton shortly after the publication of Compulsory Service.<sup>2</sup> Sir John French, the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1912, was similarly disposed:

I am personally no believer in half measures, and if in the future we have to abandon our present voluntary system it can only be to adopt the methods of Continental conscription pure and simple. <sup>3</sup>

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1 30 Mar. 1911, p.4.

2 26 Nov. 1910, Hm. 7/2/4.

3 Speech at the Royal Academy, 4 May 1912: Times, 6 May, p.10.

'If you want an Army raised by conscription equal to Continental armies, you must imitate Continental methods', wrote Balfour, communicating the simple logic of the soldiers' arguments to Bonar Law.<sup>1</sup> It was a logic which could, as in this case, be used against the National Service League. Haldane had also realized this, and the letter to Hamilton, referred to above, had continued:

I think we ought to be able to kill the National Service scheme and leave the compulsionists with two years' training; in that case I am quite happy.

However, the N.S.L. was well aware that officially to adopt conscription would be fatal. Now and then it was called upon to assuage the feelings of its own conscriptionist members, though, restrained by a recognition of the embarrassment their opinions would cause and of the impracticability of their objectives, they mostly kept silent, willing for the present to settle for less than their ideal, if only as a first step towards its attainment.

The War Office case for a continental policy was lucidly summarized in a memorandum of March 1909 by Maj.-Gen. Spencer Ewart, the D.M.O., on 'The Value to a Foreign Power of an Alliance with the British Empire'.<sup>2</sup> He contended that the safety of the Empire could best be secured by adherence to the traditional policy of the balance of power. In the past, he alleged, Britain's military power had possessed a 'value out of all proportion to its strength' through the 'ubiquity conferred by sea power',<sup>3</sup> but now this was greatly lessened by the growth of armies and improvements in communications. Until such times as the Empire was properly organized for war (by which he meant mainly an increase in available manpower), 'our value as an ally in Europe depends in a military sense on our ability to place an effective force in the field

1 Letter (typed copy), no signature, dated November, sent to Bonar Law, 22 Nov. 1912, Bon. 27/4/49.

2 WO. 106/45/E1-1.

3 *ibid.*, p.3.

immediately on the outbreak of war'.<sup>1</sup> If Britain was to avoid isolation, she must make her friendship worth having and make it abundantly clear that she could be relied upon to take her 'share of the hard knocks of war'.<sup>2</sup> The key elements, then, were the capacity to instil confidence in allies (or, more correctly, potential allies, since Britain had no formal alliance with any of the great powers) before war broke out and to assist promptly and in strength at the commencement of hostilities.

Now, for France the balance of power was a matter of armies. Georges Clemenceau was one Frenchman who took every opportunity to press upon the British Government the necessity for strengthening the Army through the adoption of some form of compulsory service. Since the fate of Napoleon, he reminded Grey while in London in April 1908 for Campbell-Bannerman's funeral, had been decided, not at Trafalgar, but at Waterloo, he could not understand why England had not built up une armée serieuse.<sup>3</sup> One hundred thousand men in Belgium would count for little, but 250,000, even perhaps 500,000, could change the course of the war and save England and Europe from Prussian hegemony. He repeated his arguments to Edward VII at Karlsbad in the following August and, according to Wickham Steed, the Times' correspondent in Vienna, received a sympathetic hearing from the King and Sir Edward Goschen, the British ambassador in Vienna, who took the view that if Britain was impotent to help France, the latter would either detach herself from the entente or, if she stood by England, be faced with the constant risk of defeat; the first course would lead to Britain's

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1 *ibid.*, p.8.

2 *ibid.*, p.9.

3 'Memorandum of Interview between Sir Edward Grey and M. Clemenceau, April 28, 1908', published as Appendix C, Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916, II (New York, 1925), pp.302-7. A fuller version of those parts of the conversation relating to compulsory service and the balance of power can be obtained from a report of an interview which Clemenceau gave to Wickham Steed later in the year: Steed to Moberly Bell, 22 Aug. 1908, History of The Times 1884-1912 (London, 1947), pp.611-2.

isolation, the second to her discredit, and both would weaken her strategic position.<sup>1</sup> The French might not, as Haldane suggested, have understood what the Navy meant to Britain,<sup>2</sup> but they did understand that as things stood they would have to bear the brunt of the fighting and take a disproportionate share of the 'hard knocks of war'. To them the relationship was one-sided.<sup>3</sup>

The scheme of the National Service League would not have furnished a mass army for service in Europe (though the exigencies of war might have modified the expert assessment of the fighting capacity of those with 4-6 months' training), but it would have gone some way towards reassuring the French - and perhaps warning the Germans - that Britain was in earnest. Above all, the possession of a numerous and disciplined home-defence force would have permitted the immediate dispatch of the whole of the Expeditionary Force. The regularity with which such phrases as 'immediately on the outbreak of war' occur in War Office papers is evidence of the general, informed presumption that a European war would be of short duration.<sup>4</sup> Here was a major flaw in the Territorial scheme: to embody the Force and train it for six months when war began was, according to current thinking, to ensure that, at the termination of that period, the men would be either joyous marchers or sullen spectators at the victory parade. An arrangement which made some sense for the defence of India made no sense in a European context.

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1 Steed to Moberly Bell, 29 Aug. 1908, History of The Times 1884-1912, p.614.

2 After meeting Clemenceau in 1908, quoted by Maj.-Gen. Sir F. Maurice, Haldane 1856-1915. The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan K.T., O.M. (London, 1937), p.228.

3 Clemenceau joined the N.S.L. in 1911. On 1 June 1911 he wrote to Roberts that 'nos deux peuples ... ne peuvent attendre aucune efficacité réelle d'une entente, qui n'apporterait pas des deux parts une complète equivalence d'efforts', Rob. 46/165.

4 Brian Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College 1854-1914 (London, 1972), pp.234-5.

More seriously, misgivings about the Territorials led to a conflict of opinion as to what proportion of the Expeditionary Force should be retained to help guard against invasion. Arthur Lee described the situation as 'Gilbertian':

The Regular Army ... is so tuned up that it is ready to start for the theatre of War at a moment's notice. ... On the other hand, the Army will never be permitted to start at once because one of its primary functions, in Haldane's scheme, is to defend these shores until the Territorial Force has completed its training and is ready to take its place. <sup>1</sup>

Lee misrepresented the situation: only one-third of the Expeditionary Force was to be left at home. Nevertheless, with the opposing armies so nicely balanced, the absence of two divisions could have been crucial. That the line held in 1914 and that the war was a long one, during which Britain was able to build up her armies behind the protection of the Royal Navy, testify more to Britain's luck than Haldane's foresight, for he was not one of that small band who predicted that the length of the war would be measured in years rather than months.

Indeed, the belief that modern war might be 'an affair of days' and the necessity, therefore, of pre-concerting military arrangements had been Sir Edward Grey's main justification for approving the military 'conversations' between France and Britain in 1906.<sup>2</sup> The exchanges had survived the crisis which brought them into being,<sup>3</sup> though probably with little practical effect until August 1910, when Brig.-Gen. Henry Wilson, previously Commandant at the Staff College, was appointed

1 Lee to Bonar Law, 21 Jan. 1912, Bon. 25/1/46.

2 Twenty-Five Years I, p.73.

3 'Action taken by the General Staff since 1906 in preparing a plan for rendering military assistance to France in the event of an unprovoked attack on that Power by Germany', initialled W.G. N. [Nicholson], 6 Nov. 1911, WO. 106/49A/1.

Director of Military Operations. Wilson's views on European strategy and his predilection for conscription were well-known through his lectures at the Staff College.<sup>1</sup> Believing that the balance of power was calculable<sup>2</sup> and wedded to a continental policy in support of France, he was not too scrupulous about his methods and soon acquired a reputation for intrigue and chicanery. In frequent contact with 'the Chief', he helped Roberts with his speeches and kept him abreast of developments in the War Office, either personally or by leaking information through his subordinates.<sup>3</sup> But, though in many respects he culpably exceeded the functions of his office, the misdeeds should not be allowed to obscure his very real and legitimate achievement in organizing the mobilization and dispatch of the B.E.F. - work which had to be carried out in conditions of the 'utmost secrecy',<sup>4</sup> as much for considerations of political as of military prudence.

When he took over as D.M.O. Wilson set to work to translate the C.I.D. directive of July 1909 into reality. His efforts were hindered by governmental inertia and naval non-compliance until the second Moroccan, or Agadir, crisis compelled an urgent review of Britain's readiness for war. At a celebrated, all-day meeting of the C.I.D. on 23 August 1911, Wilson was called upon to present the War Office case in the morning, whilst his namesake, A.K. Wilson, the First Sea Lord, put the Admiralty case in the afternoon.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly the D.M.O. had the better of the argument. Asquith described the Admiralty plan as

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1 See Wilson to Roberts, 24 Mar. 1908, Rob. WO. 105/45; and Henry Wilson Diary 3, 4, 10, 25 Nov. 1909.

2 Wilson to Roberts, 17 Apr. 1910, Rob. WO. 105/45.

3 See, for example, letter to Roberts from Capt. W.L.O. Twiss, 2 Apr. 1911, providing Roberts with information for use against Haldane in Lords' debate the next day, Rob. WO. 105/46. Twiss was on the staff of the D.M.O.

4 'Address by Maj.-Gen. Sir Percy de B. Radcliffe', post-war, n.d., WO. 106/49A/1, p.3.

5 'Minutes of 114th Meeting', 23 Aug. 1911, Cab. 38/19/49.

'puerile' and dismissed it as 'wholly impracticable'; 'in principle' the General Staff scheme was 'the only alternative'.<sup>1</sup> The meeting also revealed a significant reversal of attitudes on the matter of invasion with McKenna, the First Lord of the Admiralty, objecting 'most strongly to the denudation of the country of all regular troops in the early days', and Maj.-Gen. Sir Archibald Murray, the Director of Military Training, expressing confidence 'in the ability of the troops detailed for home defence being able to deal with small raids'.<sup>2</sup> These changes were dictated not by military or naval reappraisals of the feasibility of invasion, but by the fact that the War Office wanted the Expeditionary Force to leave and the Admiralty wanted it to stay.

In retrospect, the meeting on 23 August had decided the issue, though the navalists were slow to concede defeat.<sup>3</sup> In the previous April, Lord Fisher had written to Hankey that Asquith would never be permitted by his party to assist in any policy involving participation in continental operations.<sup>4</sup> The events of August suggested that the Prime Minister might well lead his party to accept continental intervention and prepared the way for the transfer from the Admiralty of McKenna, whom Fisher had considered 'absolutely indispensable'.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in September, the former First Lord, who was being kept closely informed of events by Hankey, was still confident that 'the Army will only be employed as the Navy wants';<sup>6</sup> and in November, Hankey himself prepared a memorandum setting out 'The case against

1 Asquith to Haldane, 31 Aug. 1911, Hal. 5909, fs.140-1.

2 'Minutes of 114th Meeting', p.17.

3 Williamson (p.193) contrasts Hankey's opinion at the time that 'no decision was arrived at' with the statement in his memoirs that 'from that time onward there was never any doubt what would be the Grand Strategy ...'

4 13 Apr. 1911, Han. 5/2.

5 *ibid.*

6 Fisher to Hankey, 29 Sept. 1911, Han. 5/2.

sending the Expeditionary Force to France'.<sup>1</sup> In his exposition of the navalist view, Hankey contended that the six British divisions would be 'a mere drop in the ocean'<sup>2</sup> and that by sending them Britain would deprive herself of any power of military initiative elsewhere, notably in assisting fleet operations. The 'proper policy' was to organize these forces in support of naval action aimed at crippling Germany economically.<sup>3</sup> The 'true motive' of those who pressed for military action was 'to bring about conscription'.<sup>4</sup> Once they had established the case for continental intervention, they would demand conscription in order to make it effective. This was, at any rate, largely true of the officers on the General Staff, and especially of those who had 'come under the influence of the dominant personality who until recently presided at the Staff College'. Apart from overestimating the impact which economic pressure would have on Germany, Hankey had fallen into two common errors in his criticism of the conscriptionists. First, he had attributed an excessive influence to Henry Wilson who, though persuasive, artful, and ideally placed to promote his aims, was not a lone voice; within the War Office he was articulating what his fellow officers were already inclined to believe. And, secondly, Hankey did not probe deeply enough into the motives of those who wanted conscription, but tended to assume that it was an end in itself.

When the crisis had passed, it was reported to Wilson that the Radical section of the Cabinet, including Morley, Crewe, Harcourt and McKenna, was calling for his head.<sup>5</sup> The first three had not been present at the meeting on 23 August, and they were incensed later, when they learned of the Anglo-French contacts and the continental orientation of British policy. The last-named had accepted his transfer to the Home Office and his replacement by Churchill with bad grace

1 Han. 7/3.

2 *ibid.*, p.2.

3 *ibid.*, p.9.

4 *ibid.*, p.10.

5 Henry Wilson Diary, 16 Nov. 1911.



for, as his notes on a conversation with Asquith just before the change was effected indicate,<sup>1</sup> he saw that the appointment of Churchill, in effect if not so clearly in intention, would reinforce the interventionists' position and help to bring the Admiralty to heel. It is a measure of the notoriety which he had achieved, that the Radicals' frustration and anger should have been directed at Wilson, who had come to epitomize the policies and attitudes they disapproved of.

The following year, 1912, was to see further consolidation of the entente with the redistribution of the fleet,<sup>2</sup> the Cabinet approval of naval 'conversations',<sup>3</sup> and the Grey-Cambon exchange of letters, which formalized the Anglo-French understanding.<sup>4</sup> According to the exchange of notes Britain was committed to nothing more than consultation, but the notes were themselves symptomatic of the manner in which her freedom of action was being curtailed. The British note, for instance, specified that 'The disposition ... of the French and British fleets ... is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war'; yet the further concentration of the fleet in home waters and the partial evacuation of the Mediterranean, announced in the spring of 1912, had manifestly increased Britain's dependence on France, since the alternatives to a naval arrangement with that country - additional construction or the abandonment of the Mediterranean altogether - were for most people financially and strategically unthinkable. Balfour considered that to secure the co-operation of the French Navy would involve 'the

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1 'Minute of conversation at Archerfield' (handwritten in pencil), 20 Oct. 1911, McK. 4/2/A.

2 Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I, pp.287-98.

3 *ibid.*, p.306.

4 22 and 23 Nov. 1912, B.D., X part II, docs. 416 and 417, pp.614-5.

substitution of a formal alliance for an informal Entente';<sup>1</sup> and Grey agreed that the Mediterranean position would 'oblige this or any Government to consider our relations with France very carefully'.<sup>2</sup> McKenna was understandably critical of his successor's policy and would have preferred increased naval expenditure to being 'driven by our weakness into dependence on an alliance with any European power'.<sup>3</sup> 'What terms', he asked on another occasion, 'will France ultimately demand from us as a condition of protecting us in the Mediterranean?'<sup>4</sup> Plainly, the answer which he, and those who thought like him, feared was conscription.

As with previous periods of international tension the Agadir crisis and its aftermath injected new life into the compulsory service movement. On 26 June 1912, for the first time at a National Service League A.G.M., Lord Roberts came out boldly on the European question - though not so boldly as to suggest that national servicemen would be sent abroad! The Army, he insisted, should be 'strong enough to prevent invasion ...., and to enable a sufficiently large and properly-equipped army being sent to help in maintaining the balance of power in Europe'.<sup>5</sup> Later in the year, in a series of public speeches at the Mansion House, Iorwich, and Manchester,<sup>6</sup> he returned to this theme, coupling it with an exposure of the inadequacies of the Territorial Force. The final

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1 'Memorandum on Anglo-French Relations by Mr. Balfour, sent by request to Sir E. Grey', n.d., sent 12 June 1912, Bal. B.M., Add. MSS. 49731, f.4.

2 16 June 1912, *ibid.*, f.12.

3 [Naval policy], 24 June 1912, Cab. 37/111/79, p.5.

4 [Naval policy], 3 July 1912, Cab. 37/111/86, p.4.

5 *Nation in Arms*, VII (Midsummer, 1912), p.95.

6 On 22 July, Rob. 125/2/80; 23 Sept., 125/2/109; 22 Oct. 125/2/117.

speech of this trio aroused the fiercest controversy through its apparently provocative<sup>1</sup> analysis of German policy:

Now gentlemen, at the present day, now in the year 1912, just as in 1866 and just as in 1870, war will take place the instant the German forces by land and sea are, by their superiority at every point, as certain of victory as anything in human calculation can be made certain. Germany strikes when Germany's hour has struck. That is the time-honoured policy of her Foreign Office. 2

Yet the very fact that this speech stimulated vehement reactions, on both sides,<sup>3</sup> is indicative of a change in the whole atmosphere in which questions of national defence were debated.

Over the last eighteen months, an awareness of the probable implications of British foreign and defence policy had filtered through, not only to Radical members of the Government, but to anyone who took an intelligent interest in these matters. Because of the proximity of the continental problem, both geographical and (some would have added) temporal, the question of compulsion now evoked a public response, markedly different both in scale and kind. Henceforth, national service was no longer an extravagant dream or nightmare, but a credible

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1 It was long an article of faith in anti-compulsionist writing that speeches like this helped to precipitate the very situation they predicted. Such a view is to be found in Hayes, pp.117-8, and throughout Playne, The Pre-War Mind in Britain. It stems from a conviction that German intentions were no more bellicose than those of any other power, and had the advantage, in 1912, that whatever happened the opinion was vindicated. Recent research on Germany policy before 1914 would suggest that Roberts was nearer the truth than his critics then or later: see, for instance, Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War (London, 1967), pp.3-92 and especially pp.87-92.

2 Rob. 125/2/117, p.2.

3 The Morning Post, 1 Nov. 1912, p.7, published a letter from 105 Unionist M.P.s congratulating Roberts on the speech. For the very different reaction of the Liberal press see F.S. Oliver, Ordeal by Battle, pp.336-42.

proposition. Their expectations raised, the compulsionists stepped up their activities; but they were not to have a clear field, for the recent developments had also shaken the nonchalance and equanimity of their opponents. As a result they were confronted with a vocal, articulate, and organized opposition, on a scale which they had not encountered before. Save for the periods when public attention was preoccupied with Ulster, therefore, national service was never more of an issue than it was during the two years before the outbreak of the Great War.